

**CONFIDENTIAL**

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Members' Eyes Only





# FROM A PILOT'S NOTEBOOK

- AS SOON AS I PRESSED THE MOUSE BUTTON I KNEW I HAD TROUBLE - a pair of HASSLERS appeared promptly and slammed in to me. One life gone and little to show.

To show who was in charge I accelerated towards the descending LANDERS and wrote several of them off - then came the cry for help - a LLAMA had been nabbed by one. Of course it was far off, on the edge of the SCANNER - I accelerated towards it, ducking and weaving and luckily destroying an HACD\*\* on the way. When I got there I carefully shot the lander, caught the llama and put it down on the surface, protecting myself with a dab of SHIELD.

No relief - I had run into a bunch of seeded mines and an NPB\* was right ahead. I punched CONTROL for the SMART BOMB but too late, second ship gone.

My survival into the next wave was in doubt - time to Sharpen Up! As my third ship rezzed in, a MUTANT and a couple of HOVERDRONES appeared - this time the SMART did its stuff. I had a second to breathe, study the Scanner and decide where the most urgent threat was.

Then, two more cries for help, nearer this time and close together. Flying now by instinct I managed to rescue both llamas at once. Wonderful - until the MOTHER SHIP zapped me. They fell to their deaths, from a great height. Six more to die and we'd lose the planet and plunge into a fight in Deep Space.

No time to worry - two SPORES appeared right ahead - a second Smart saw them off. The next few secs were pretty productive - suddenly the Scanner began to clear but **what was this** - something coming at me FAST! Turned out to be a KUSSTOM BLYTTER and it didn't like me. I trashed it with my shield on an a well-aimed blast, and so into the next wave six of my llamas intact.

**ANDES ATTACK -  
DEFEND OR DIE!**

\* 'Have a Crummy Day' - Mine Seeder

\*\* 'Nasty Pulsating Blob'

**ANDES ATTACK and GRIDRUNNER, soon!**  
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**from your retailer or direct from LLAMASOFT**

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# Contents

- Psst...** Page 2  
At last, a serious note from The Boss Upstairs, as he mulls over the selling of BT and why he is now dabbling in the high-rise world of writing magazine intros instead of running a leading software label.
- Top Secret - - - Do Not Read** Page 2  
Agent Orange's pigeons get a lay in as he finds a breakdown in communication.
- Chess** Page 3  
Bob Coles, a veritable Grand Master at the whole Chess thing, gets to grips with the best programs on the market and holds an impromptu Tournament.
- The Team...** Page 7  
At last! The moment you have been waiting for as the CONFIDENTIAL team are revealed in stunning full-page 100% black and white. (Gasp! Swoon).
- To Le Manor Born** Page 8  
Clive Weatherley continues his look at the software houses across the Channel.
- The Holy Grail** Page 10  
Upstaging Monty Python takes some doing, but has *Lancelot* done it with the Grail competition? Find the final questions revealed!
- Elite vs FOFT** Page 11  
Forget Bruno and Tyson (Oh, you have), the battle of the Titans at the moment is between these two giants. But which one comes out of the ring alive? Newcomer Lockwood reveals all.
- Adventure Building** Page 13  
Keith Campbell finds out how a major software house puts together an adventure from the original idea to when the game hits the streets.
- It's In The Post** Page 15  
No, not your cheque, the latest helping of PBM coverage!
- Personnel File** Page 16  
The llama-man rides again in a look into a day in the life of a well-known heavy metal zap freak.
- The Golden Chalice Awards** Page 18  
So who won the best adventure of the year award. Our spy on the spot tells us all.
- MirrorWorld** Page 19  
John Trevillian concludes his look into the demesne of multi-user games with this insight into a free, non-commercial game.
- Dead Letter Box** Page 22  
Can you help our Agents stuck in awkward positions? Well, I'm certainly not going to try. The NoticeBoard is back with all the latest contacts.
- Mapping Your Adventure** Page 23  
John Barnsley's look at this most essential aspect of adventuring since the 'inventory' command.
- Bestiary File/Bixby by Rob.** Page 26  
They're back and raring to go. See them both on one page! Can you take the pace?
- Spirit Of Adventure** Page 27  
Another glimpse into the realm of Northern live role-playing. Just across the Pennines from T'Mill lair another group of sword-wagging weirdos!
- Old Chestnuts** Page 29  
Michael bywater is back and this time makes a few comments on Zork and tomorrow's computers.
- Puzzle Page** Page 30  
Win yourself some cheaper games and have fun solving these brain-numbing conundrums, including your very own Monster Crossword.
- Charts and Diary Page** Page 31  
The Official Secret's lists to what are the best-selling games and the unmissable dates to stick down in your diary.
- For Your Eyes Only** Page 32  
From his payphone in the Cellar, the Man In Black rings out with all the latest letters.
- The Back Page**  
Now that the Hardware competition is almost over, we have a spare page, see what we do with it at the back. So now you can have fun with the Diary Of An Adventurer and the Unbelievably Essential Guide To Software-Speke.  
\* \* \* \*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Once again, The Boss Upstairs would like to thank everyone who contributed the usual blood, sweat and tears that make up this issue of CONFIDENTIAL, especially the ever-superb team that is: John "Biggles" Trevillian (for flying off the road and into someone's rockery coming back from the MirrorWorld interview), 'Cuddly' Clive Weatherley (for crumpling his car twice on the way to the office), Charles "Big Bang" Cannon (for driving into the canal on the way home from the pub - and then telling us it needed a wash anyway), and Robert "Nigel Mansell's Co-Pilot" Lockwood (for losing his ejector seat while trying to turn the stereo up on the motorway). And a special mention to: Bob Coles, Level 9 and all at Mandarin, Keith Campbell and Mike Gerrard for their time at the Golden Chalice Awards, the original programmers of Elite, Jeff Minter for being such a hoopy cool frood, Henry Mueller, Pip Cordrey and those inside the MirrorWorld (Thanks Neil!), John Barnsley, Bixby and Rob, Pam Turnbull, Michael Bywater and, of course, that vision in rubber gloves, Vera "Have you heard about me curtains?" Sawyer, our resident cleaning lady.



...THESE TICKER TAPE MESSAGES KEEP ME IN TOUCH WITH EVERYTHING THAT IS GOING ON IN THE CONFIDENTIAL OFFICES...SO LET'S GET ON WITH IT...

# Psst... A WORD FROM THE BOSS UPSTAIRS

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

It was predictable that British Telecom would one day lose interest in computer games.

The prospect of Telecomsoft being shut down or sold to the highest bidder brings me out in a rash of emotion, even though two years and four months have elapsed since, frustrated by bureaucracy, the pecking order and the sheer futility of arguing for logic to prevail, I threw in the towel. Were it not for the general good that BT's involvement has done to the UK games industry, particularly in terms of programming, I would consider my two and a half years hard labour for the corporation to be a complete waste of time.

For those of you that have not heard, British Telecom has announced that it will attempt to sell Rainbird, Firebird and Silverbird as one job lot. The official reason for the decision is that computer games no longer fit in to their scheme of things, but if this were

the only reason the sale would have been made easily, silently and behind closed doors. Almost certainly, in truth, Telecomsoft has been soaking up corporate cash too fast for too long. The main contributors to the losses would have been Beyond Software (bought by BT from EMAP and then closed due to poor performance) and Firebird Licensees Inc (Telecomsoft's American operation, started from scratch and shut down last year). The financial history of the group is not likely to make attractive reading. However, the rumoured "lock, stock and barrel" asking price is £5 million, which means that interested parties should have at least £2 million in their pockets before knocking on BT's door.

None of the existing players in the UK computer games game are likely to be interested at a seven figure price, especially when they find out just what is for sale and what is not. It's just possible that some important people from foreign parts will take the trouble to dissect the balance sheet in search for anything of value. But my bet is firmly on the whole process taking so long



that Telecomsoft, with no major releases for some months now, and without many of its former staff, will simply wither away.

Rainbird and Firebird may re-hatch to see new titles published under their wings, providing that BT takes a realistic line in selling the trademarks. After all: what's in a name?

R.I.P. Rainbird Software, once at the leading edge.



THE BOSS UPSTAIRS.

## SECRET NEWS - - - DO NOT READ - - - TOP SECRET NEWS - - - DO

Hi. Don't know what happened to the pigeons this issue: they're either on strike or the industry's suffering a general death of adventure news. Apart from the snippets laid out below, the majority of the stories that made their way onto my desk carried about as much interest and excitement as a Barbara Cartland novel in braille. Anyway, see what you make of this little lot...

You remember a live RP set-up called **Trouble At'Mill**, don't you? Of course you do, we featured them in the last issue. Well things have been reet blooming for Phil Gregory and t'lads, partially due, of course, to the wonderful publicity we gave them; so much so that Phil has abandoned his day-job and taken on the running of T'Mill full-time. Sorry, I was supposed to call this an 'Article Update'.

Any QL-owners out there? There are hundreds still around apparently, and their owners seem to be best supported by Richard Alexander and his company **CGH Services**. Among other activities, Richard publishes a regular QL Adventure fanzine called **QLAF**, which is packed full of reviews, articles, tips, etc. and costs a pound an issue. Phone 055-934-574 for details.

The nigh-on legendary **Golden Chalice Awards** took place ever so recently, where members of the **Adventurer's Club** voted in various categories within the adventure-game world. A full report lies somewhere within these pages...

The market is about to be bombarded with more flight-sims, it would seem. **Electronic Arts' Skyfox II: The Cygnus Conflict** will be out soon on the ST, and boasts a 'realistic sensation of flying' and 50 starbases at the player's disposal. Also shortly will arrive **EA's Chuck Yeager 2.0** for the PC, which features 18 aircraft and 'under-belly fly-bys'. Various versions of **F16 Combat Pilot** should be touching down by the time you read this. This one comes from **Digital Integration**, includes a 104-page manual and will apparently 'redefine the best in simulation software'. Also look out for **Power Pigeon Pilot**, in which you play any one of four species of racing pigeon, choose beak size, define feather arrangements, etc. To cut out all the confusion, we should be covering all the plethora of flight simulations in the next ish. (By the way, the last one was not entirely serious).

Fancy being transported back to the ancient world of Tarmalon on a quest to retrieve an evil scroll? Thought you might. **Legacy of the Ancients** from **EA** will allow you to do just that next month when this fantasy graphical adventure is released on the PC. As well as managing character attributes such as intelligence, dexterity and charisma, the player must use strategy to solve a wealth of puzzles in an assortment of towns, forests, castles and dungeons. He can also make deals with flowers and animals according to the press release.

Finally, my favourite. At long last Britain's greatest writer ever comes to the computer screen. What do you mean Not a Penny More has been done? Not Jeffrey Archer, Shakespeare, that's who. **Topologika's** new release **Avon** is billed as 'a Shakespearean adventure for students of the bard' and presents problems as 'Why do you suddenly find yourself wearing an ass's head? Why does Yorrick sometimes say Golesida? And why does the adventure take place on three different dates?' You don't need to be a Will expert to solve the adventure, as it's the problems that are pinched from the bard, not the solutions. Phone 0733 244682 for details.

And that's it. If anyone out there has any news for me, please send something soon. It's getting lonely here, with only my avian friends for company. See you, hopefully, in the next issue...

Agent Orange.



...ISSUE FOUR ALREADY?...I FEEL IN SUCH A GOOD MOOD, I THINK I'LL GO AND INTERVIEW A FEW RECEPTIONISTS...NOW WHERE DID I PUT THOSE THUMBSCREWS?

Bob Coles looks at that most ancient game and asks:



# CAN COMPUTERS PLAY CHESS?



Back in 1980 I was living in London when some new-fangled chess-playing machines became commercially available, so I made my way to Harrods where some of them were being displayed to find out just how good they were. I set myself up against a Fidelity Chess Challenger only to discover that it was dreadfully slow on the higher levels and a poor chess player on the lower ones. My opinion of the machine went even lower when I checkmated it in under twenty moves and then found that it would play the same game move for move if its first three moves were the same.

Eight years later times had changed. At the Barbican Chess Congress in 1988 a Novag chess computer was entered in the Open section. This is traditionally a strong tournament and that year was headed by Grandmaster John Nunn, ranked ninth in the world. The Novag was on 3.5 points from five games and won the sixth and last round by default because its opponent refused to play a computer. Of the other rounds, two of the draws, according to its operator, happened because the computer allowed perpetual check "...which it could have avoided on the three-minutes-a-move level but I had to have it on two-and-a-half-minutes-a-move to be sure of making the time control." One of those draws was against the player who beat me easily in the first round.

John Nunn was also involved with chess computers when he gave a simultaneous exhibition in support of Sport Aid in which he played approximately twenty humans and two computers at the same time. He lost only

one game, to one of the computers. This game followed a pattern I have observed in games between a human and a chess program of comparable strength. Even with the aid of an opening library the computer usually comes out worse in the opening and by the early middle game is in a position which in a human-human confrontation it might be expected to lose. When it comes to actually winning the game, however, the human finds it harder than expected and the computer defends accurately, quite often coming out on top and going on to win. At one point during the game John Nunn was heard to comment, "I didn't think it could play that," and then played a sacrifice which on the face of it appeared to win. Several moves later it became apparent that the computer had assembled a tenable defensive position and with its extra material it went on to win.

I can think of two reasons why such a change in advantage occurs. When the human is on the verge of winning he or she has formed a low opinion of the computer and so doesn't bother to find the best way to win, not expecting accurate defence. At the same time, finding most of its analysis leading to bad positions, the computer starts looking around for better moves and so finds a higher proportion of good moves than it did earlier. This will be illustrated by some examples from games between various programs later.

So much for the dedicated chess computers. How good are the programs available for home micros? Your editor (spy-master?) was good enough to send me some chess programs to

examine and I played a tournament between them and myself, the results of which can be seen in a table elsewhere in the article. Also dotted around the pages are comments on the features of each of the individual programs. The tournament consisted of the following players: *Psion Chess* on the Atari ST, *Sargon III* on the Amiga and IBM/PC and compatibles, *Colossus Chess X* on the Atari ST, and *The Chessmaster 2000* on the Amiga. Both *Sargon* and *Colossus* claim to be the ultimate chess program whereas *Chessmaster* is "the finest chess program in the world." *Psion* was much more restrained, merely pointing out that it once won the World Microcomputer Championships. Decide for yourself how extravagant these claims are by looking at the results table. I also received a copy of *Battle Chess* for the Amiga which is reviewed elsewhere. I did not include it in the tournament because it was clearly a weaker chess player than the others and anyway, I only have access to one Amiga so Amiga-Amiga matches were out! *Battle Chess* does not claim to be a serious chess program, though it is still strong enough to beat the average chess novice.

For the tournament I set the programs to 1 minute per move and limited myself to 1 hour for 60 moves. At this time rate they play reasonable chess without being too slow.

A few words about the results. The discerning among you may have noticed that they are extremely good for my ego and pretty depressing for *Sargon's* programmers. A look at the games reveals a slightly different story.

**THE TOURNAMENT RESULTS**  
(Letters in brackets indicate colour played)

PLAYER	R.C.	P.C.	C.C.X.	C.M.2	SIII	SCORE
R. COLES		1(W)	1(B)	1(W)	1(B)	4
PSION CHESS	0(B)		1(B)	0.5(W)	1(W)	2.5
COLOSSUS CHESS X	0(W)	0(W)		1(B)	1(B)	2
CHESSMASTER 2000	0(B)	0.5(B)	0(W)		1(W)	1.5
SARGON III	0(W)	0(B)	0(W)	0(B)		0



Title:- *Psion Chess*  
 Authors/Publishers:- Psion Ltd.  
 Machine:- Atari ST



**Playing Style:**

Clearly the strongest program, Psion has probably the deepest opening book. It handles all phases of the game well when thinking for itself and was the only program to deliberately sacrifice for a positional advantage. It handles most endgames well but does have flaws in this area as can be seen from examples in the main article.

**Graphics:**

Very nicely presented in colour and monochrome, the shading on the latter creating a pleasant lighting effect in 3-D. It is slightly annoying that the clock times and the move list are only displayed with the 2-D board but the mouse handling and piece movement are well done.

**Packaging:**

A little sparse. The one book has only two pages per language and describes the program rather briefly.



**Features:**

Psion has all the usual features such as showing its analysis, replaying a game, showing clock times, taking back moves and changing sides. There are also facilities to print the moves and current position, and the usual selection of master games.

My games against both *Psion* and *Sargon* followed the pattern described above where I gained an advantage, though only a slight one against *Psion*, and then blew it to finish up with one rook and the same number of pawns each. These positions would almost certainly be drawn with accurate play by both sides. The only advantage I had in both games was that if the rooks were removed from the board the resulting king and pawn endgames would be wins for me. To my amazement both programs allowed rooks to be exchanged! I give the *Sargon* game as an example.

White: *Sargon III*. Black: R.Coles.  
 Position after black's move 33 (fig 1).

34. Rc3

*Sargon* starts to go wrong. 34 Kc4 heading for b5 would give good drawing chances. The move played is superficially attractive because it threatens Rc6 check and then Rxb6 but *Sargon* has underestimated my next move.

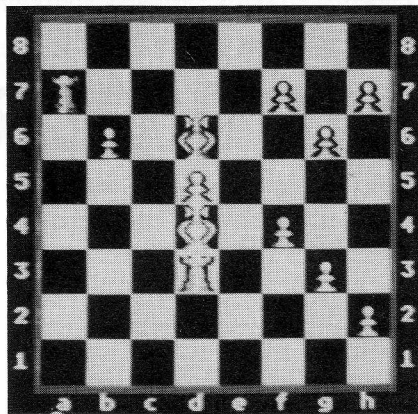


Figure 1.

Ra4 check  
 35. Rc4 b5

(forcing the exchange of rooks)

36. Rxa4 bxa4

*Sargon* would have done better to retreat its king on move 35 after the check, surrendering its d pawn. This type of rook ending, with level pawns on one side of the board and one side having an extra pawn on the other side are well known. With a rook's pawn as the extra pawn they are usually drawn, with a bishop's pawn usually won and with a knight's pawn, as here, it depends where everything else is. Unfortunately for *Sargon* the pawn ending is an easy win for black. He just pushes his queenside pawn up the board, dragging white's king away from the kingside and when both queenside pawns have been captured the black king is nearer the remaining pawns and so can get to them sooner, take some, and then promote one of his own pawns. The game continued:

37. Kc3 a3  
 38. Kb3 Kxd5  
 39. Kxa3 Ke4  
 40. Kb4 Kf3  
 41. Kc5 Kg2  
 42. g4 Kf3  
 43. h3 Kxf4  
 44. Kd4 Kg3  
 45. Ke5 Kxh3  
 46. g5 Kg4  
 47. Kf6 Kf4  
 48. Kxf7 Kxg5



and black pushed his h pawn up the board, promoted it to a queen, and won.

This is an area where chess programs can be improved. The principles that apply in the endgame differ from those that apply in the opening and middle game, and in the type of pawn endings and rook and pawn endings described above, as they are well known to chess theory. It ought to be easy for a chess program to spot that a particular type

of ending is approaching and use specific algorithms to assess these positions and so choose the best one. It would then use a specific set of routines to play that type of endgame. So come on you chess programmers, improve those endings!

My game against *Chessmaster* was a comedy of errors. I won a knight in the middle game by some sneaky tactics and promptly blundered it back for a pawn by trying to be too clever. The extra pawn was enough to win the endgame which again was made easy for me.

The easiest game was against *Colossus*. As early as move eight it exchanged a knight and bishop for a rook and pawn. Nominally this is an equal exchange, counting knights and bishops as three pawns each and a rook as five pawns. That early in the game however a knight and bishop are usually better than a rook because the latter's motion is restricted by the large number of pawns on the board. I was able to organise my knight and bishop effectively and gradually picked off its pawns. Though the game took forty-seven moves it seemed clear for most of it that I would win.

*Sargon* programmers, do not give up hope. Your program was unlucky. Its game against *Psion* was an extremely tense affair, with *Sargon* being two pawns ahead for some of the game. *Psion* clearly sacrificed the second one but I suspect it blundered the first. For most of the game I had no idea who was winning but it gradually became clear that *Psion* had more idea of how to play the position and it eventually won.

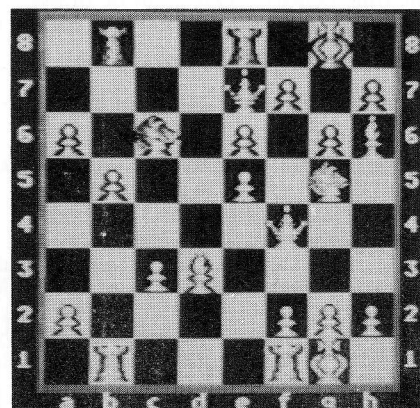


Figure 2.

In *Sargon-Colossus* the former built up the following strong attacking position.

White: *Sargon III*. Black: *Colossus Chess X*. Position after black's move 19 (fig 2).

Here *Sargon* overlooked 20 Ne4! which wins easily. The game instead

Title:- *Battle Chess*  
 Authors:- Interplay  
 Publisher:- Electronic Arts  
 Machine:- Amiga



**Playing Style:**

Battle Chess is significantly weaker than the other programs. It does have a large opening book but when thrown onto its own resources soon goes wrong. Its main weakness is a tendency to grab material and so it is a sucker for sacrifices.

**Graphics:**

The whole reason for this game is the graphics. On the 3-D board the pieces are animated figures which go through a fight sequence whenever a capture occurs. Rook takes queen is one to watch out for. Very entertaining and well done, including the sound. Actually playing a game on the 3-D board is quite difficult because the pieces don't look much like normal pieces, but there is a 2-D board you can switch to while deciding on your move before making it on the 3-D board.

**Packaging:**

Two booklets are provided here, the first describing the features adequately, the second giving the rules of chess in an informal style and including some master games. These games cannot be loaded from disk but obviously can be played through by referring to the packaging.

**Features:**

Due to the animation sequences taking up disk space the other features available are a bit sparse but they do include everything you really need such as load and save game, set up board, force move, suggest move and of course setting levels and choosing colour. There is also a modem facility so you can play with someone miles away if you've got the right hardware.

went

20 Rfd1? Nxe5!



A strong defending move which came as a great surprise to me.

21 Qxe5 f6

and black regains its piece by fxg5 after the white queen moves. *Colossus* then played some fine chess to win by picking up white's weak pawn on c3.

*Sargon* in fact noticed Ne4 a move too late. (It has an analysis window which

displays its thoughts - of course, I closed that window when I played it - honest!) If the move rate had been slower *Sargon* would probably have won by one of the following means.

After 20 Ne4 white threatens 21 Nxc5 Qxc5; 22 Qf6 and the only way to prevent checkmate on g7 with the queen is to play 22 ... Qf8 which loses the black queen to the bishop on h6. Black can avoid this threat by moving its bishop on c5, e.g. 20 ... Ba3. After this 21 Nf6 check Kh8; 22 Bg5 is overwhelming. Two possible continuations are 22 ... Qf8; 23 Nxb7 Kxh7; 24 Qh4 check Kg8; 25 Bf6 followed by 26 Qh8 mate; or 22 ... h5; 23 Nxb5 Qf8; 24 Nf6 followed by 25 Qh4 check and 26 Qh6 mate.

Another try by black at move 20 is ... f5 but 21 exf6 wins material after either 21 ... Qf7; 22 Ng5 or 21 ... Qd8; 22 f7 check.

*Sargon-Chessmaster* was not a fair test. I had to use the IBM version of *Sargon* for this match which is much weaker than the Amiga version. This can only be the result of poor programming since I was running the game on an Apricot Xen which out performs an Amiga any day of the week. Perhaps the IBM *Sargon* programmers should give up hope. My personal opinion is that there is not a lot of difference between the playing strengths of the Amiga versions.

*Colossus* seemed to get into a mess in the openings. It has a learning facility for its opening book and as a consequence its book is not as deep as the others. It may be that *Colossus* will indeed learn as it plays, but there are so many opening variations that I suspect it will take a long time. In its game against *Psion* it was the first one to run out of book knowledge and was on the ropes by move eleven, and was soon demolished. This was in a fairly well known opening variation and certainly less obscure than the stuff it played against me. Maybe the programmers overlooked this line when writing the opening book. The poor position it achieved against *Sargon*, described above, was due to indifferent opening play and it also allowed *Chessmaster* to obtain a favourable position from the opening. In both games it defended extremely well and then won by exploiting small mistakes by the opposition.

The remaining game is *Psion-Chessmaster*. *Psion* was soon presented with the opportunity to win a bishop but used the wrong rook, allowing *Chessmaster* to wriggle out with rook and bishop for a queen. These were the remaining pieces along with some pawns when the following position

was reached.

White: *Psion Chess*. Black: *The Chessmaster 2000*. Position after white's move 52 (fig 3)..



52. BF3 check  
 53. Kf2 Rxe4  
 54. Kxf3

I assume that *Chessmaster* played the

Title:- *Sargon III*  
 Authors:- Hayden Software  
 Publisher:- Logotron  
 Machine:- Amiga

**Playing Style:**

*Sargon* handles the opening well whether using its comprehensive opening book or thinking for itself. It plays more aggressively than the other programs in the early middle game but all too often it then loses its way. It plays the endgame rather poorly and patient play at this stage of the game will usually beat it.

**Graphics:**

Only a 2-D display with this one and the piece graphics are rather primitive, though clear. The pieces are erased and then redrawn at their new positions rather than moving on screen but I don't think this detracts from the presentation too much.

**Packaging:**

The best of the lot with a thick book lucidly explaining the rules of chess, how to operate the many features and describing briefly the master games on the disk. The book is written for the Macintosh version and addenda are included for the Amiga version which is nearly identical.

**Features:**

This program has most of the features chess programs usually have and includes facilities for displaying its analysis if you want to cheat. It does not, however, show clock times which I like to use to limit myself to the computers move rate.

**Note on IBM version:**

This comes with the Macintosh packaging which is rather useless since it is keyboard driven rather than menu driven. My copy didn't have any IBM specific documentation so I had to experiment with holding the control key down and pressing keys. The graphics are worse than the Amiga version and the playing strength much poorer. I would have reservations about buying this version.





Title:- *The Chessmaster 2000*

Authors:- The Software Toolworks

Publisher:- Electronic Arts

Machine:- Amiga

**Playing Style:**

Chessmaster has a deep opening book and usually follows up with the right ideas if the opposition deviates from theory. In the middle game it suffers from a lack of purpose, generally playing aimlessly until forced to defend by its opponent. It also occasionally makes bad blunders. Its endgame play is generally quite good but again it makes the odd mistake.



**Graphics:**

Nicely presented 2-D and 3-D boards with various features such as clock times and analysis displayable when wanted. The piece movement is very smooth. On the whole well presented.

**Packaging:**

Two booklets with this one. The first adequately describes the features and the second gives brief descriptions of the master games and problems supplied on disk.

**Features:**

All the usual features are here plus some others. The style of play can be set to Best, Normal or Coffeehouse, the number of random moves increasing from Best through to Coffeehouse. There is a facility to analyse a game afterwards and there are voice, music or bell sound options.

above combination with the idea of playing 54 ... Rxe6 levelling the material, but at this stage noticed that after 55 fxe6 by white the pawn ending is lost since it can't stop the b pawn promoting. At least one of these programs can assess pawn endings! Instead *Chessmaster* played



54. Rxb4!!

and the position is now drawn! There is no way that the white king can penetrate the black position because it can't pass the black rook, and the white

**Chess notation:**

I have used algebraic notation throughout this article. Pieces are indicated by their initial letter capitalised, except for 'N' for a knight. If there is no capital letter the move is a pawn move. This letter is followed by a lower case letter and number indicating the square to which the piece is moving. The squares are lettered 'a' to 'h' from white's left to white's right and numbered '1' to '8' from the white side to the black side. If two pieces of the same type can move to the same square they are differentiated by the letter of their current file. E.g. if rooks on 'a1' and 'f1' can both move to 'd1' the move of the rook on f1 to d1 would be written 'Rfd1'. If the pieces are on the same file the rank number is used instead. E.g. if rooks on 'c1' and 'c5' can both move to 'c3' the move of the rook on 'c1' to 'c3' would be written 'R1c3'. Some symbols follow moves as comments. I have used '?' - bad move, '!' - good move, '!!' - brilliant move.

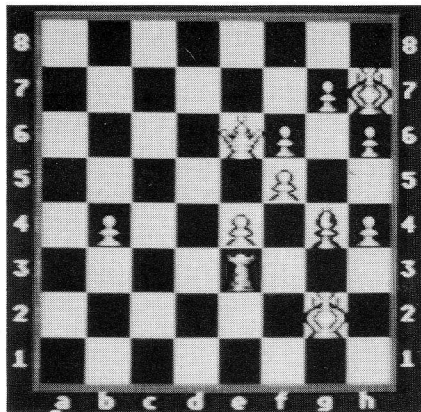


Figure 3.

queen on its own can't do anything. The game went on for another exceedingly boring fifty moves until both programs realised it was drawn by the fifty move rule i.e. a game is drawn if fifty consecutive moves are made without a capture or a pawn move. Very astute of the *Chessmaster*.

Incidentally, *Psion* could have won the game earlier by pushing its b pawn up the board. Another situation where an endgame specific routine could be useful.

It is noticeable that in all these games the programs played better when defending rather than attacking. So if you're losing to one don't give up hope, and if you're winning be careful. I think endgame specific routines would improve their play significantly. How to improve attacking capabilities is less clear. The problem seems to be that there is a wider choice of plausible moves when attacking and attempts to limit the moves considered are fraught with danger since one might throw out obscure good moves as well. I suspect programmers will rely on greater processor power to analyse more deeply. One thing seems likely, if I hold a similar tournament in ten years time, I won't win. They're getting better, I'm not.

If anyone is interested in the the moves of the tournament games I will forward copies on receipt of an SAE and a 10p per game copying charge. Write to R.Coles, 24 Railey Road, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB11 3EN.

Title:- *Colossus Chess X*

Author:- M.P.Bryant

Publisher:- CDS

Machine:- Atari ST



**Playing Style:**

Colossus has a less comprehensive opening book than the other programs. This is deliberate since it improves its opening book as it plays, i.e. it is a learning program. I presume eventually it will learn, but it is hampered in this task by playing weakly in the opening and early middle game when out of its book. It is an extremely tenacious defender and frequently recovers from bad positions. It plays the endgame fairly well but does take its time noticing how to win better positions.

**Graphics:**

At first sight this looks like a well presented game with 2-D and 3-D boards but when it comes to playing with it faults start to appear. The mouse pointer frequently disappears leaving you wondering where your piece will move to. The 3-D board looks slightly warped and the pieces are not centred on their squares which I find irritating. When the pieces move there is a pointless erasing and redrawing and then jerky movement to the new square. When castling sometimes two rooks are temporarily displayed. The 2-D board is much better and has perfectly smooth movement. It is also irritating that menus can't be accessed while the program is thinking and that clock times and the moves list are displayed on an alternative screen which doesn't show a board. The game also runs only in colour.

**Packaging:**

A comprehensive booklet is supplied which concentrates at first on getting you started and then moves on to discuss the operation of the features in detail.

**Features:**

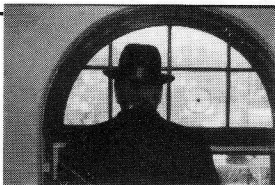
Apart from the usual features Colossus has some interesting playing styles. It can be set to play for a win, draw or lose and has several level definitions such as average move rate or all the moves in a particular time. I like playing it on the latter mode with five minutes for all the moves. This applies to both players and concentrates the mind wonderfully. Not being able to see the clocks and the board at the same time spoils it slightly.

...THE TIME HAS COME AT LAST...WE MUST REVEAL OURSELVES TO OUR AGENTS!...NOW DON'T GET EXCITED...THERE ARE REGULATIONS ON THIS SORT OF THING...

# THE TEAM

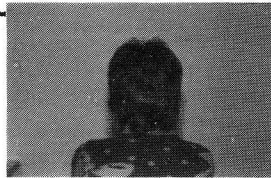
The names and faces have been changed to protect the innocent...

## The Boss Upstairs



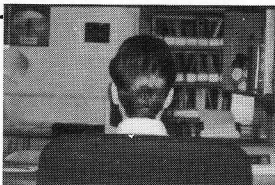
Former head of a spy network: dropped out of sight for a while. Re-appeared as head of PR company. Believed to be front for covert activities in the world of thought, strategy and adventure. Those that displease him vanish without trace. His ultimate goal is believed to be world domination.

## Agent French



Long time associate of the Boss Upstairs. Mistress of the murky world of finance. Masterminds financial planning for UK operations. Thought to have close contacts in world of merchant banking. Possible 'insider trader'. Loyal. Copes well with other neurotic agents. Suspected football fan.

## Agent Weatherley



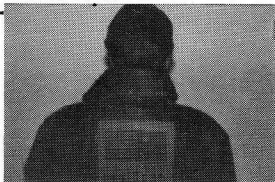
The Boss Upstairs' Number Two. Veteran field agent. Ex-stock car driver. Pretends to be a PR officer - even the Boss has been fooled. Longest surviving agent still in the field. Believed to have designs on the Boss's job. Bi-lingual, writes cross-words and proof reads *The Gruaniad*.

## Agent Ranger



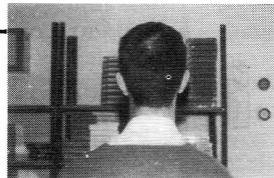
Trusted administration agent with access to all spy records. Official Secrets' version of Miss Money Penny. Believed to have operated somewhere in Northern US for many years. Code name Mata Hari. Well versed in art of escapology. Makes a very nice cup of tea. Her teeth are all her own.

## Agent Trevillian



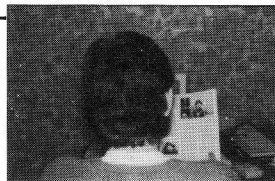
Rising star. Recruited by chance when met Boss in Soho lavatory. Known controller of all UK agents. Man of so many guises he can never remember who he is. Ex-Renault combat pilot, now models leather jackets. Is a workaholic. Wants to be an editor when he grows up. Is hideously deformed.

## Agent Fotherington-Smythe



Long time croney of Boss Upstairs. Worked with him since Project *Big Booté*. Expert in the field of electronic and games warfare. Recently graduated from Mr Magoo School of Driving. Carries secret messages concealed in bags of parcels. Known football hooligan.

## Agent Lockwood



New recruit to spy-ring from world of violence, sex, drugs and accountancy. Masquerades as writer and buyer of computer games. Sometimes thinks he's in the middle-ages. Dresses in 1940's garb. Not quite all there and gets the dangerous jobs. Expendable, but one to watch.

## Agent Taylor



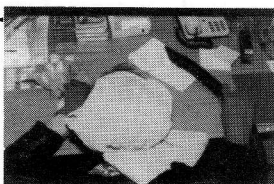
Relative newcomer to the team. Studied medicine at Yale. Transferred from Morpheus Hospital neuro-surgery department to answer the phones and put agents instructions in envelopes. Branching out into industrial espionage and room bugging. Expert in field of plastic explosives and depth charging.

## Agent Cannon



Code name 'Big Bang'. Public school education. Posh accent. Master of disguise - can even look scruffy in a suit. Wealth of contacts. Through these, finds out what's going on in rival companies. Ex-stunt driver for *Dukes of Hazzard*. Mysterious. Disappears for hours around mid-day.

## "Vera"



Cleaning lady, dwarf and arab terrorist.



...TREVILLIAN!...WHAT'S THIS? NO FATALITIES THIS MONTH? THE AGENTS WILL GET COMPLACENT...AH, AGENT WEATHERLEY, HOW IS YOUR REPORT COMING?...

Tired of living life in the bus lane, Agent Weatherley, our very own Singing Detective, jetted off to Paris having decided it might be an idea to get away for a while. While in hiding, he found time to explore the French "scene" and now continues his European report with a look into the life of Lankhor...

# TO LE MANOR BORN

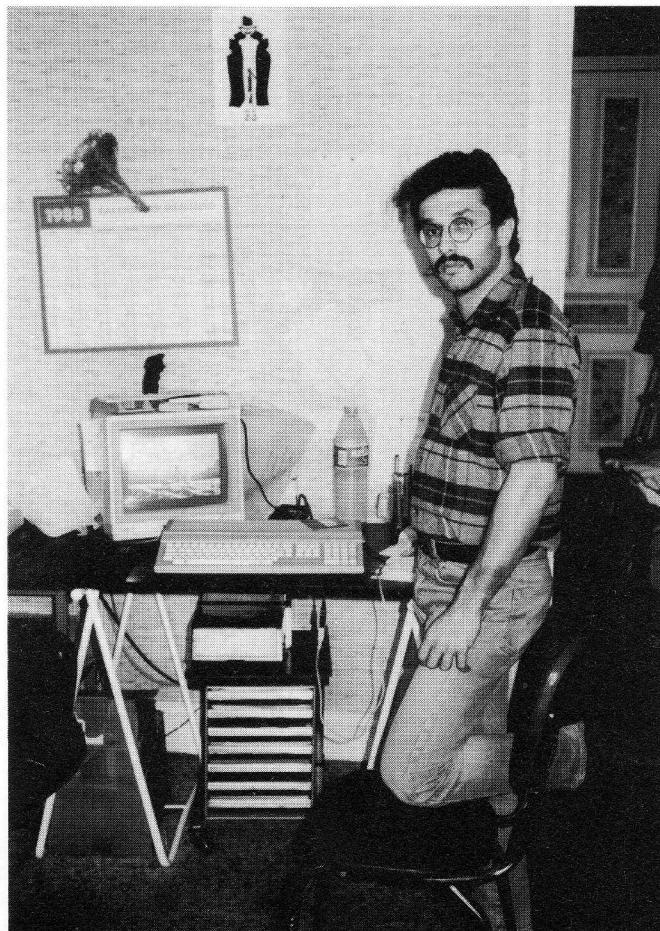
At the end of the last thrilling episode of my French jaunt, I left you as I was about to tuck into the unknown culinary wonders of French cuisine at a tres chic brasserie (Isn't that where they make sexy underwear? TBU.) just round the corner from EXXOS's offices in Paris. After the grilling I'd given them it seemed appropriate that I should order a hamburger with, you've guessed it, French fries, some unidentifiable but colourful bits of salad, and a glass of vin rouge. With this exotic fare washed down with coffee and best wishes from Phillippe Ulrich, I pushed on, not to visit the Arc de Triomphe or to get an Eiffel of the tower, but to pursue my exploration into the French programming scene. First class on Boeing the Boss had promised me but now I learnt that I would be swimming back until I had at least two exclusive articles under my belt. Where could I get my second one? Screwing my courage to the cutting block and with the memory of what happened to Agent Kane on Page 16 of Issue Three firmly imprinted in my mind, I set off for the Rue des Plantes.

Plant Street? Botanical Specimen Avenue? Hmm, it's never a good idea to translate foreign place-names into English as my language teacher used to drum into me at my every attempt to describe crossing The Sleeve to Calais. But that was where I was heading, to visit Bruno Gourier of Lankhor. Rue des Plantes? Needless to say there wasn't a blade of grass, let alone plant, to be seen in the concrete jungle. No, just rows and rows of tall, uniform, brownstone HLMs (stand for Habitations a Loyer Modere, or blocks of flats to the uninitiated), concealed in the heart of which was Numbre 77. Was Bruno going to be the archetypal games programmer, beavering away in his bedroom twenty-four hours a day, never seeing the sunshine, never breathing the fresh air, not allowing himself contact with the outside world? Or did the mundane exterior of this Parisian edifice hide gleaming chrome and glass, in the nature of the offices I had just spent the morning at? As I dragged open the swing doors and battled my way into the Hitchcockian lift (all metal trellising and open-work floors), I settled for the former.

Bruno Gourier is the Head of Programming and Coordination at Lankhor, the French games team that developed among other titles the brilliant *Mortville Manor*, the whodunnit-and howwozitudun that's had mystery fans guessing and scratching their heads for months. I thought it would be a pretty neat idea to track him down, ask him a few questions on the company, the people, the ideas etc, and so form the basis of a really enlightening thrill-a-minute article for the latest issue of CONFIDENTIAL. It must

be said dear reader, that Monsieur Gourier is a man of few words, each one exquisitely chosen and the whole lovingly crafted into two sides of eloquently sparkling prose, the last thing a hack like me needs in an interviewee who answers monosyllabically all of my carefully crafted questions in the first ten minutes of my visit. But I exaggerate. It didn't take long for Bruno to relax and get used to the fact that I wasn't some mega-serious computer expert, waiting to grill him on all manner of technical niceties, but merely someone who quite enjoyed the odd hour playing *Mortville Manor* and had a magazine deadline to meet. (Well, why don't you get on with it then and stop waffling? TBU.)

As I guessed, Bruno works from home, a bed-sit type flat on the seventh floor, with a spectacular view of all the bits of Paris that you don't particularly want to see. His workplace



doubles up as his sleeping and general living area, so there's not a great deal of room to swing a cat once you've clambered round the sprawling futon that takes up most of the floor. The desk is surprisingly uncluttered for a programmer's, and carries the obligatory bottle of mineral water and an assortment of dictionaries, sketches and scribbled sheets of notes scattered round the ST and monitor. On the wall above hangs a sprig of Heather, presumably heralding a lucky future for the follow-up to *Mortville* that Bruno is currently working on; *Maupiti Island*. Next to this is a clock depicting a flasher with coat open wide, displaying the, er, hands.

Bruno himself is a quiet friendly style-conscious young thing: designer specs, designer stubble and a 70s lumberjack shirt that lets the image down. He works strange tortuous hours that only the body of a programmer can endure, and was understandably tired. As we

sipped coffee of a strength that would need to be tasted to be believed, he answered some of my questions. I began by asking him the origin of the slightly spooky name Lankhor.

"When we began to write commercial games, we used the name 'Kylkhor', one of my favourite words. It means a type of mystical magical circle" (I checked this in my dictionary and he's not lying), "which fitted in well with my thoughts and interests at the time. This proved a little difficult for people to pronounce, as you can imagine, and so we combined it with Jean-Luc's surname to produce the name 'Lankhor'. Altogether a bit more original."



Jean-Luc Langlois and his sister Beatrice are old friends of Bruno and the friendship goes back to the trio's student days. Now, the three head Lankhor each one in control of their own particular specialised field, Bruno being in charge of programming, Jean-Luc taking control of the technical side with his assistant Christian Droin, and Beatrice being responsible for the amazing speech and sound. Add to this the artistry of graphics expert Bernard Grelaud, and you have what must be one of the most talented and sexually balanced, games programming teams in Europe. So how did they start?

"I began writing business programs and utilities, and spent along eight years doing this!" Bruno explained with a weary smile. "But I soon realised that games were more entertaining, as well as being more profitable for me personally. I wrote my first game, *Joust*, alone but my days of solo programming are over. To create a successful game you need to be the best in so many different fields. And now I think we have that mix."

*Mortville Manor* was, surprisingly perhaps, Lankhor's first big success, written originally for the QL some years ago. The subsequent popularity and capabilities of 16-bit machines must surely have come as a godsend to these three friends, allowing them to take creation to greater heights. They publish the programs themselves, Bruno assuring me that they do have office facilities somewhere, and their distribution is handled by 16/32 Diffusion in France and Active Sales in the UK.

*Mortville* was enormously successful in France picking up two of the much coveted Tilt "Game of the Year" awards in 1987, one for best adventure and the other for best sound effects. The two framed awards hang rather incongruously on a wall in Bruno's hall, by no means taking pride of place but perched crookedly among tattered schedules and faded prints. He appears to enjoy the accomplishment of his work and the fact that people buy and enjoy his games, but shuns the glory and glare of praise and publicity.

For those not familiar with the game, *Mortville Manor* is a graphical puzzle whodunnit, set in the 1950's and starring you as Jerome Lang, a Bogart-style private detective given "...the chance to revisit the uncertain terrain of you're childhood past." Summoned by an urgent telegram from an old friend, Julia, you arrive at the Manor in the middle of a snowstorm, accompanied by clichéd but effective owl-hoots and clock-chimes. Immediately you learn from the butler that Julia is dead, and that several friends and relatives are staying in the house, all, as in the best tradition of the genre, with various skeletons in assorted closets, and motives galore. Playing against a real-time clock, it's up to you, or Jerome, to explore the rooms of the Manor, interviewing the suspects in order to get to the bottom of Julia's death. The characters reply in audible speech, each one in his or her own version of the Inspector Clouseau-meets-'Allo-'Allo French accent, which, delight of delights, you can hear as many times as you like. The more you discover in the Manor, the more you can ask the family about. But being found in a room where you're not supposed to be may lead to your being thrown out into the snow, so discretion is a must. Apart from conversations with the characters, the entire game is icon-driven and a true experience to get stuck into. I asked Bruno about the inspiration for *Mortville*.

"Well, I am a total Science-Fiction fanatic, but steered clear of using it as a theme for a game as it is too clichéd. Instead I chose my other love: old films. I immersed myself in 50s detective film. I watched every Bogart movie about five times! And I read all the period novels too to get the atmosphere, which is a very important element of *Mortville Manor*."

The game appears very realistic too, with a whole assortment of everyday objects to be found when rifling surreptitiously through the family's drawers. Are they all needed in the adventure?

"Absolutely not, and that is why it is just like being in a strange house. Of

course there are objects that are not important to the crime, rooms that bear no relation to the death - just as there would be in a real investigation. No illogical problem-solving with bizarre objects like in so many adventures. But the clues are all there, and with the right movements and questions all will be revealed!"

Yes, there is something undeniably satisfying and novel about searching Eva's boudoir and discovering a greasy old hairbrush and a manky reel of cotton. Not that I'm one hundred percent certain that they're nothing to do with the case, you just never know. A complete solution has yet to appear in any of the British magazines although the beans were spilled by the German *Aktueller Software Markt* last month, and although I'm not giving anything away, eyebrows will be raised at the surprising dénouement, believe me. So what's next on the Lankhor release schedule?

The follow-up to *Mortville* is another in Lankhor's mystery series and stars once again the enigmatic Jerome Lange. *Maupiti Island* has a decidedly nautical flavour and takes place aboard a yacht and, as the title suggests, on an idyllic Bounty-bar island in the Pacific. The game was not finished, but Bruno took me through several of the graphics screens, and I broke out in a tan just looking at the sun-drenched beaches and hearing the waves lapping on the shore...Enough! *Maupiti Island* will be out in the UK around May, but is suffering the eternal illness of the software industry - slippage. No other clues to its content, or solution, or scenario were leaked, not even to CONFIDENTIAL. Huh! And that was it from Bruno, really. He showed me a selection of arcade and educational games (check out *Elemental* if you fancy a mega-tricky puzzle maze game, and *G.Nius* for a totally original exploration/action arcade game). We chatted about this, that and the other, none of which would be in the slightest interest to you, dear reader, and then I said my adieux and then left for the long trek home...

It was then that I realised that I only had two of my expected three articles and my heart froze. Cautiously picking up the telephone, I dialled through to the CONFIDENTIAL main offices.

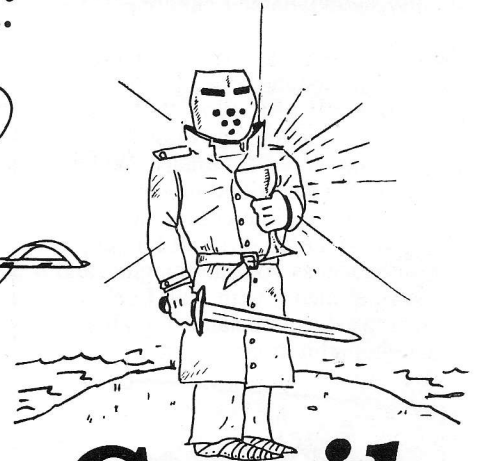
The sweet-sounding sexy voice on the other end of the telephone told me I was through to Official Secrets. I said, "Hello Trevillian, no time to chatter. Put me through to the Boss Upstairs..."





...AGENT FOTHERINGTON-SMYTHE? WELL, WELL, WELL, IT'S BEEN SUCH A LONG TIME...WHAT'S THAT? YOU WERE DOING SOME GARDENING AND YOU DUG UP WHAT?...

A long time ago in the year of our Lord 1988, Mandarin Software and Level 9 joined forces to devise a competition based around an adventure which led to the burial place of an ancient artefact. And now, exclusively to CONFIDENTIAL, we can reveal the finalists questions that will take you to...



# And The Holy Grail

Well, at least it would take you to the burial place of the Grail, but the competition ended in March and the winners will be announced shortly. Yet as quite a few of our members entered the competition and did not get into the final or even for those who are interested, here are the final set of questions, which describe where the Grail can be found. Apart from the thirty-six finalists, no one else has seen these questions, so get on the trail of the Grail quest:

The ultimate aim is to work out the name of the famous place where the Grail is hidden.

The contest involves the following stages:

1) Each of the nineteen questions, A-S, has a one-word answer (To give some wrong examples, if the questing beast was sixteen dog-power, Lancelot's father helped Arthur in Camelot and the four queens stand near Arthur's grave, the answer to A, B and Q respectively would be 16, CAMELOT and QUEENS).

2) Each of the answers is converted to a one digit number:

\* If it's a word, replace each of the letters by its position in the alphabet (A=1, B=2, C=3...Z=26) and add them up.

\* If the number is bigger than nine, add its digits together. So 69 becomes 6+9=15.

\* If the new number is still bigger than nine, repeat the process until a one-digit number is left. So, 15 becomes 1+5=6.

\* (So, taking the examples above: 16, CAMELOT and QUEENS would become 7, 6 and 9).

3) The answers from the above build up into a 6-digit map reference (you will have to guess the letters at the front of the reference), using the following formula:

First digit:	A+B-Q
Second digit:	C+D-O
Third digit:	E+F-R
Fourth digit:	G-H+L
Fifth digit:	I+J-P
Sixth digit:	K+M-S

(Again, taking the incorrect example above, the first digit of the map refer-

ence would be four:  $A+B-Q = 7+6-9 = 4$ ).

4) Once you have this reference, use a map to find the name of the famous place at the map reference. Write this down.

In the box below are the individual questions. You may need to refer to the Penguin English Library version of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and to Arthurian books in general, but they promise that they have avoided obscure sources for the information. Good luck.

## Ye Olde Questions

- A. How many hound-power was the Questing Beast?
- B. Where did Lancelot's father greatly help Arthur?
- C. How many times did Lancelot rescue Guenever at the stake?
- D. How many brothers, or half-brothers, had Mordred?
- E. Which sword's name indicated it could cut steel?
- F. How many Round Table knights saw the Grail at Pentecost?
- G. Who was also called Cuchillain?
- H. Who of Arthur's Grail Knights lived longest?
- I. What colour was a new knight's shield?
- J. What exactly was Lucy?
- K. What was Lancelot's real name?
- L. Emperors' bird.
- M. Arthurian namesake of computer.
- N. Assuming the celebrants of Mass were supernatural, how many mortals saw the Grail in Castle Carbonek?
- O. Where was Geoffrey the writer from?
- P. Someone's original name was slightly changed to please the French. What was it?
- Q. Who stands near Arthur's grave, between his sons and his quoit?
- R. Kind of tree which may have grown on the Isle of Avalon.
- S. The historical Arthur seems to have been a war leader similar to Alfred the Great. How many centuries apart were they?

.....AGENT LOCKWOOD...WHAT'S ALL THIS SPACE CADET NONSENSE ABOUT?...COME IN...YOUR SUB-ETHER SPACE TRANSMISSION IS BREAKING UP..

**This story starts long, long ago...no, it's not that story. Our tale is essentially one of greed, intrigue, a quest for wealth and piracy, but not in the places you might expect...**

## ELITE vs THE FEDERATION OF FREE TRADERS



About four years ago, a certain game called *Elite* appeared on the BBC

home micro (whatever happened to that?) and for a while at least, that exclusive club had something to make the rest of us envious. The entire game had somehow been crammed into the Beeb's 32K memory. This was quite an achievement by Ian Bell and David Braben, considering both the games depth and that their code was largely a mess (it took a team of four an age to convert the game to 16-bit formats). *Elite* was born and it became the first 16-bit game to reach number one in the sales chart.

Gremlin Graphics have since tried to duplicate its sales by producing an *Elite* clone in their own space-trading game, *The Federation Of Free Traders*. It's strange that the law only recognizes the plagiarism of ideas and not styles. My first view of *FOFT* tended to enforce the 'copy-cat' angle as direct comparisons could be drawn without even opening the box. Looking inside, I found things again startlingly similar, but steadied myself with the thought that there are a limited amount of ways a game can be packaged. Why the similarities?

Well, the truth behind *FOFT* is probably that around two years ago, Gremlin realised that there was a huge unsatisfied market for an *Elite*-type game, especially in the new 16-bit field. No one seemed in the least inclined to convert *Elite* while Bell and Braben were only willing to do the job for a large reward. Gremlin's understandable reaction was to start work on their own space-trading game. Unfortunately, time and events overtook them. Not only did the project take two years to complete, but in the mean time work began on rewriting *Elite* and when it became available for the Atari ST and Amiga, it was an over-night success. Gremlin's problems were further compounded when they began advertising *FOFT* about six months before it was ready.

When the ST version was released in February it contained several major

bugs. In the first copy I played, launching (if you could first figure out how) was impossible - you just disintegrated in space, albeit very prettily. Also, SAVEing the game had an annoying tendency to erase part of the program disk. It seemed that Gremlin had painted themselves into a corner by advertising the product too early. When demand and interest outstripped their ability to deliver, they were forced into rushing the product out onto the market before it was ready. It seems inconceivable that any properly tested game could be released containing a bug that wipes part of the game disk, unless of course it's been produced under extreme pressure.

Yet, bugs in games are nothing new. Even *Elite* has a few. What's more important though, is what does each game offer the player? Which one is better, and why?

### ELITE

While veterans love this game, those who've never played it are probably wondering what all the fuss is about. *Elite* falls into that rare category of game - a shoot-'em-up requiring a fair measure of thought and strategy for success. Your task is simple and yet has been made hard enough to achieve to present a lasting challenge without becoming frustrating.

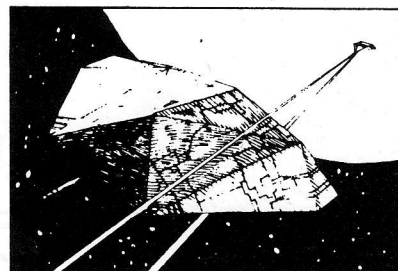
Starting with a modest Cobra Mk III space ship and a little money, you begin as the lowest rank of pilot. You must learn to survive and prosper in a largely hostile universe of over 2000 planets. In order to survive you'll have to know what to run from and when to fight. In order to prosper, you'll have to be shrewd in the types of cargo you buy and where you sell them for the best profit. Pirates perhaps pose the biggest problem, as they'll not hesitate to attack if you look weak or might be worth some credits. On top of that, there are bounty-hunters and a dangerous race of alien called The Thargoids to contend with.

Initially, nearly everyone you meet has better weapons, more missiles, more everything in fact, and it seems prudent to run, but the only way your rating of 'Harmless' can be increased is

by destroying 'hostiles' and thus gaining kill points. Pressing the 'W' key will reveal your current score. Anything up to 2080 points classifies you

as 'Harmless'. Status points increase beyond that by doubling each level.. You'll become 'Mostly Harmless, Poor, Average, Above Average, Competent', then 'Deadly' and finally 'ELITE'. Attacking innocent traders or dealing in illegal substances can earn you a criminal record which makes access to space stations harder. Destroying police ships gains a lot of kill points quickly, but earns few friends. Your legal status is likely to suffer, changing from 'Clean' to 'Offender' or 'Fugitive.' Vapourising hostile Thargoids or Pirates though, often earns a reprieve by reducing your criminal status. A balance between attacking the police and selling illegal goods on the one hand, and eradicating the pirate menace on the other, will see your score rise rapidly. By careful trading, you can amass enough money to buy better equipment for your ship, like shields, military lasers, fuel scoops, cargo scoops, escape pods etc.

The ST version of *Elite* doesn't contain any missions until you reach the highest status, which can prove quite a time consuming task. The C64 version presented the player with a mission within the first few hours of play. The player was invariably offered the job of taking some cute furry animals called 'Tribbles' to another planet. The Tribbles start multiplying in the hold until they have blocked out your entire viewing screen. Later on the Space Navy informs you that their latest ship has been stolen and it's your job to





destroy it. So hot-footing from one planet to another, you find yourself engaged in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse with a ship that can render itself invisible. If you finally manage to make it all the way to the top, then you are offered the job of transporting blueprints for that latest Thargoid invasion ship to a high-tech planet where they can be analyzed. Naturally, they aren't too happy about this and try their best to stop you. Only some of these touches seem to have been translated onto the 16-bit versions.

*Elite's* graphics are quite good, but nothing outstanding and the sound is little to shout about. Its brilliance, however, lies in the challenge, its slick execution, the thrill, the thought required to make a profit and stay alive. The manual is quite comprehensive at 64 pages, but only 30 of these are actually taken up with explaining the rules and how the ship functions. There's a quick-start guide, everything is laid out logically and you can quite easily boot the game and begin playing within a few minutes. Once you get used to the on-board scanner and can work out where the enemy ships are, blasting becomes a lot of fun. It has its little vagaries of course, such as docking with space stations, which can be more deadly than fighting Thargoids if you haven't got good reflexes or an automatic docking computer. On screen there's a friendly icon system that allows quick access to information and easy execution of commands like buying, selling etc.

*Elite* isn't perfect - once you've mastered the cycle of trading, flying from planet to planet and fighting - it can become a little repetitive. It's the desire to reach the top that keeps you going. But *Elite* has undeniable class and lasting appeal and there aren't many four-year-old titles you can say

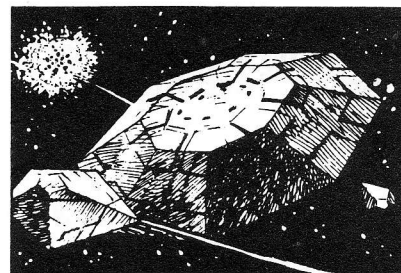
that about.

## FOFT

So, what of the young pretender, *The Federation of Free Traders*? Well, I tried very hard to like this game, I really did, but in the end I had to let the facts speak for themselves. I even decided not to let my first bug-ridden version prejudice any opinions formed. I set out trying to avoid any comparisons with *Elite* as it should be the game quality and enjoyment that counts, not the originality of the subject matter. However, in the end I found it impossible not to make the comparison and the whole thing proved to be a bit of a disappointment. Perhaps I felt let down because the advertising and pre-release hype had led me to expect more. Whatever the reason, I found *FOFT* to be as frustrating as it was enigmatic and mysterious.

Opening the box you'll find a colour poster with pictures and data on all the types of spacecraft. There's a keyboard guide, a 74 page manual, two disks and an audio cassette. The latter and one of the disks contains music that can be loaded separately and listened to as you play the game. Apart from these, there's little in the way of discernible sound effects. I found firing my lasers and hearing a monotonal zap a little disconcerting. An opportunity to improve upon *Elite's* passable sound has been missed here. That said, however, when the Audible Threat Warning was on and I came under attack, other people in the building thought someone's car alarm had gone off.

The manual begins by telling you that the game includes over 8 million planets, a variable weapons system, a real shipboard computer EDI, sophisticated communications and a selection of missions. This seemed to be a fine way



of combating the repetitiveness of *Elite* and the selection seemed varied indeed.

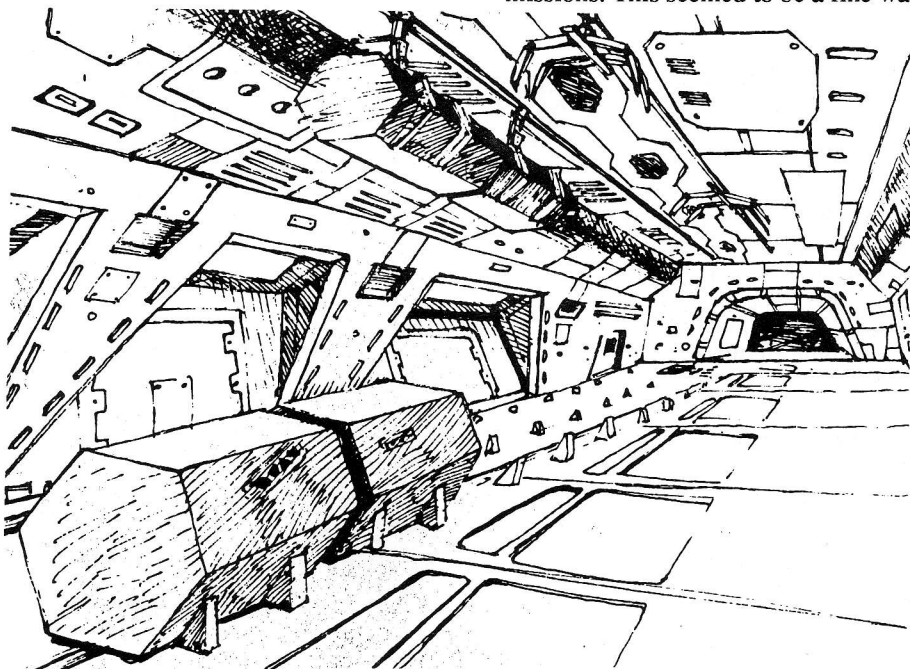
The manual then launches into the Federation history. All this is the usual background material for the game, but what is important is that it explains about Galnet, a type of galactic computer system through which you can trade, get missions, get paid and even have your progress monitored.

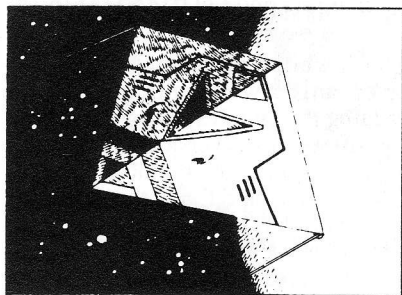
Anyone can wear a Fed' crest, but its rank structure is rigid, rising from 'Cadet' through 'Initiate, Rookie, Pilot, Chief, Commander, Wing Commander' and finally 'Admiral'. There can only ever be one Admiral and currently it's an ex-pirate called Laiserbaiter. Challengers for his title seem to disappear mysteriously - enough said?

New recruits are given low risk tasks upon request such as delivering packages, destroying rogue satellites, investigating missing ships, escorting convoys etc., but to progress you'll need to buy wisely on the cargo market to sell at a profit. This means studying the galactic map carefully to see which planets on your mission route will pay generously for which types of commodity. The money made here can be used to equip your ship.

Well, sorry to disappoint you, but this is where everything started to fall down. In truth, I did what most people do when they get a new game. I ripped open that packaging, discarded the rules and loaded it up to see what it was like. After an hour of making no progress, I resorted to reading the rule-book only to find myself more confused than ever. Instead of having a clearly laid out set of instructions that describe how the controls work, the manual illustrates how to engage engines, plot a course etc. by putting them into something akin to a story. This wouldn't be so bad if the passages were less cryptic. They deal with a pilot's first mission, ship board checks, launching, combat and completion of the mission. However, since there are quite a few different missions you are at a loss from the start. My allotted task was completely different to the one described in the manual, making interpretation complex.

One of the first things you should do is





hook up to Galnet. Through this, you can access the cargo exchange, watch prices and stock fluctuate, while buying fuel or equipment for the ship. In some cases, by buying large amounts of goods you can cause an unnatural fluctuation in the market price as the cargo become rarer. A profit can be made by quickly reselling and you've not even left the spaceport!

There are a couple of messages to be read on the space jock's bulletin board hinting at possible missions, while an early version of the game included a joke about *Elite* here. By typing 'FOFT', you are offered a mission to get you started. By calling up the galactic map and then a more detailed system map, you can see what sort of place your destination. Cargo can then be purchased accordingly. There's a thriving black market (of course) and you can opt out of the Federation lifestyle by concentrating on trading. The press of a key will lock the computer on your target world and you can then blast off into hyperspace (arming the escape pod first is a good idea). The

screen explodes in a myriad of colour, and with an effect similar to that seen in *Star Wars*, you arrive at your destination.

Great! If only it was that simple. Despite the manual telling me what keys I had to press to achieve what result, I found the instructions so vague that I didn't get anywhere until a pile of 'Guide to Cadets' turned up at the office. These comprise a small folded document which condenses the basic instructions from the manual necessary to access your first mission, plot a course, land on planets and interpret radar data. Either someone forgot to pack them in the original boxes or they were hurriedly produced when people began to point out how unclear the manual was. Once you know what you're doing things get a whole lot better.

Once you are in space, the ship is easy to handle with the joystick, rotating in two planes. The radar shows other objects in different colours indicating whether they are friendly, hostile or unknown. It's possible to trade with other pilots just by being persistent - the ones that say 'no' initially, often give in to offer good deals. I liked the arming system and that the ship can be equipped with three separate types of weapon. Combat can take quite a bit of time getting used to, but once you've mastered the controls you're in for some fun. If you're unlucky enough to get hit, you can allocate droids to repair damaged areas which is a good feature, though they do take a little

time to get finished. In *Elite*, a terse message often informed you during a battle that you'd lost your ECM's or retro rockets. The only way to repair them was to buy some more.

Planets consist of filled terrain grids with plains, valleys, hills and oceans and your ship hangs mid-screen over the scrolling landscape. Once through the atmosphere you nose down towards a runway and if it's safe, the shipboard computer does the rest. It's much the same when docking with a space station - a computer does it all for you.

What of the game itself? Well, I have now tried several missions and while it has been far from a chore playing the game, I haven't been drawn back to it with any real enthusiasm. It's not that my progress was in any way slow or hindered, but it seemed to lack charisma, and the manual aside,

## OVERVIEW

*FOFT* struck me as a game that had gone off course. What it seems to lack is any real style or originality and offers no definite improvements on what has gone before. Yes it boasts new options, such as missions, but they haven't been capitalised upon to breathe vigour into the game or make it feel fresh. *FOFT* has a long way to go to approach *Elite's* standards and may prove to be a game unable to live up to its own reputation.

Agent Lockwood

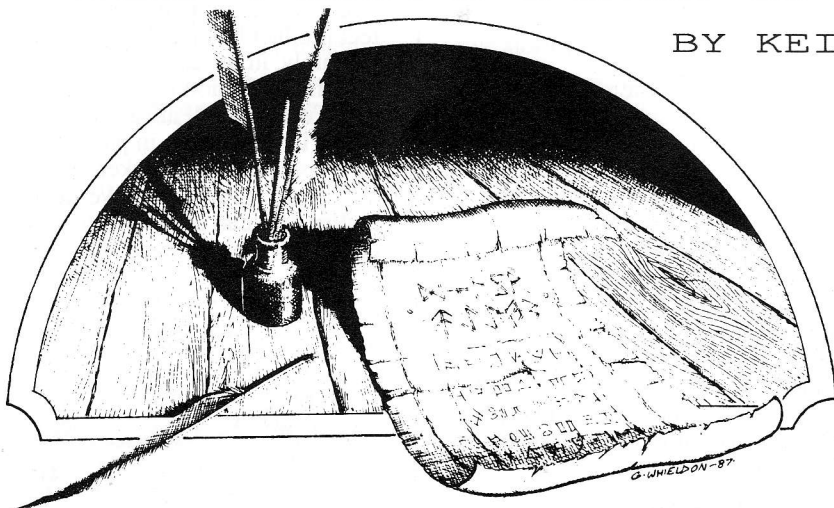
...WE REALLY SHOULD HAVE SOMETHING ABOUT THIS WHOLE ADVENTURE THING...I MEAN, CAN ANYONE TELL ME HOW THEY PRODUCE THESE WIZZO GAMES?

Many people  
But how do  
large, impr-  
tract?  
to invest-

write their own adventures, for fun, or perhaps for a little profit.  
the professionals, the big software houses, set about producing  
essive quality adventures, facing an empty computer and a con-  
CONFIDENTIAL asked one of the most famous adventurers around  
igate.

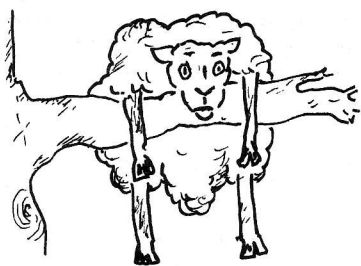
# ADVENTURE BUILDING

BY KEITH CAMPBELL



Building an adventure from absolute zero is a very rare event, even among 'home brew' enthusiasts. Most people use a tailor-made system, a '4GL' (Fourth Generation Language) specific to adventure programs, to assist in the process. Those writing for fun (and sometimes commercially) use *GAC* or *The Quill*, whilst the professionals invariably have their own 'system', usually written in-house. This enables the text and plot that drives the text to be entered in a very high level form, ready to be compiled into an executable program.





But before the building can start, just as in house building, the first essential is a plot! So let's drop in on Magnetic Scrolls and see what went into the writing of *Myth*, the game written exclusively for Official Secrets members. Although a 'mini' adventure, the processes in its creation were typical of previous Magnetic Scrolls games.

Paul Findley, author of *Myth*, had for some time been keen to write an adventure based on Greek mythology. When he got the go-ahead, he spent some time thinking about the storyline, during which he bought a lot of books and researched the subject thoroughly. Once he had a rough idea for a plot, he held discussions with Anita Sinclair and Ken Gordon, and the merits of various aspects were argued. Eventually, a final draught of the plot was drawn up, with contributions having been made to it by everyone in the office. Chapel Court is a very informal place, and anyone overhearing such a conversation will stop by and join in. The final plot will be accompanied by a detailed map, with all the locations and exits defined.

Paul next entered the programming phase. The writer does not necessarily have to do the programming, but this is usually so. If the author is not a full-time employee, as in the case of John (*Fish*) Molloy, he is welcomed in to the office to spend as long as it takes to program the adventure. The programmer's task is the most exacting one in the process. He has to have a high degree of awareness for the feel of the game, for inevitably ideas will occur to him whilst he is working, and he will add something to it. This must be done with care.

Programming is carried out via a terminal, typically an ST keyboard, connected to a VAX mini. The 'pseudo code' that is Magnetic Scrolls' system, is entered as free format language - there are no input fields or prompts as in *Quill* or *GAC*, either to guide the programmer, or, perhaps to limit his thinking. The advantage of using a much larger computer than the 'target' machines on which the finished program will run, is that it can contain the adventure system as well as all the data, and produce a compiled program that will just fit into the target

machines. It can, of course, also be used for development of a number of games, concurrently.

First the programmer will set up a few rooms, together with their exits and destinations. A very speedy compilation will allow him to walk from room to room, discovering what the place he has created feels like to live in.

Next follow the objects. Attributes are used to give a range of properties to each object, and among the amazing selection available to the programmer, are: moveable; worn; wearable; hardness; texture; size; weight; owner; hangable; floats; set. OWNER, for example, if specified as the player, would enable him to use a command like "examine my shirt". SET allows objects to be given the common attributes of a set of similar objects - 'set clothes' would give an object all the characteristics already defined for the set of clothes.

As well as rooms and objects, all the messages possible from any command have to be entered, and finally come the 'specials'. Specials concern the mechanisms of the puzzles, and are very specific to each game. The specials work in the following way.

When the game is compiled and run, and the command entered, the parser identifies the verb and the first and second nouns. Suppose, taking a puzzle that could have come from *Myth*, the command PUT LAMB IN TREE is entered. Control is passed to the verb routine for PUT, which calls its 'specials' before proceeding further. The system checks that the first noun is held, IN causes a check to be made to ensure that the second noun has an attribute defining it as a container and available, sets a flag to record that the LAMB is in the TREE and sends the appropriate message to the screen.

Sometimes 'timers' are required, and these are non-event triggered specials, that would, say, cause a bomb to explode a set number of moves after it has been dropped.

Magnetic Scrolls' system is constantly in the process of being enhanced with an ever-increasing range of features to suit situations that arise in specific games. In *Jinxter*, for example, the concept of water and floatability had to be added - and is now in place if required in a future game.

Once in a playable form, the game will be playtested, mainly by trusted friends of Magnetic Scrolls - Rainbird will not playtest until it is virtually ready for mastering. In the case of *Myth*, Inter-Mediate did the playtest-

ing at this stage too.

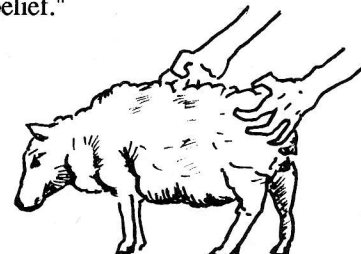
All the while a program is taking shape, artists, working from home, are creating the pictures, using computer art utilities. Two versions of each are required. First a 16-bit picture is drawn, using an ST, and this is copied as faithfully as possible, by 'hand' as it were, onto a C-64. Each version of a picture serves as a master for conversion to run on other machines of its ilk.

Before the game is ready for mastering, everyone has a dabble with it, and goes through a process of modification and tuning. The sort of thing that is most often changed is the implementation of a puzzle. Although perhaps agreed in the original plot, once programmed, the puzzle may perform in an unexpectedly difficult or unsatisfactory way, and suggestions are made at this stage to improve on it. Before the game goes out, everyone at Magnetic Scrolls will have been involved, and everyone must be satisfied with it.

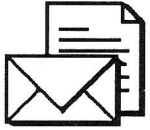
By now, the packaging is being prepared, and whilst Magnetic Scrolls are responsible for back-of-box copy, plus the contents of the box itself - all the paraphernalia that is bundled in with the disk - the artwork for Rainbird releases is commissioned by Rainbird.

Finally, there is the essential stage in which the publisher launches the game to the press. Press releases (broadsheets giving facts about the game, perhaps its authors, versions, prices, and a very brief synopsis of the plot) are sent out, followed by review copies. Sometimes, for a 'special' game, a press launch will be held, usually at a suitably atmospheric venue in keeping with the game scenario, giving us hacks a chance to speak to the people involved, and try the game at first hand.

And then it hits the public. Advertisements are placed in magazines, and copies of the game start to appear in the shops. After all this loving care, you would think that a very nearly perfect product had just hit the streets! Certainly, in the case of Magnetic Scrolls, perfection is what they strive for. Yet there will always be some minor inconsistency in parser or response for the nit-picker. But then, as Anita Sinclair says: "We can't create reality - we can only hope to suspend disbelief."



...WHAT ON EARTH IS VERA DOING RUMMAGING AROUND IN THAT DUSTBIN? HOW UNHYGIENIC...GET HER TO STOP IMMEDIATELY...



# IT'S IN THE POST!



**In a recent letter, someone asked me: "Can adventure games be played by mail?" An interesting question and, on the surface, the obvious answer is no. At least not exactly.**

**For when you look again, there may be more to this hobby for the adventure gamer than meets the eye.**

The adventure game format of 'play-by-screen' is not the same as the postal format of 'play-by-mail' at all - for a start the response times are a little different - but after taking into account the capabilities and limitations of the media, there are some striking similarities.

For instance, the end result is the same. That feeling of success and frustration in an open-ended format role-playing game is just as acute as when you finish or are thwarted by a particular problem via the post. Both suspensions of disbelief have their faults and failings, yet both have strengths and unique angles too. While some of the computer games are little short of deciding inputs on a theme, they range in difficulty just as much as adventures do. In the current marketplace, the format can be broken down into three main stages, each with its own unique categories. The first can be termed Moderation, the second Setting and the third Topic. In trying to decide which game to choose, just pick one from each of the categories in the diagram below, and you should end up with your personal preference in the play-by-mail world.

To explain the stages, let's first decide what each offers:

## MODERATION

Computers vs Humans

When tackling this subject, you will always come down to the fundamental question of whether the game you are looking for should be arbitrated by a man or a machine. When comparing these two fundamental criteria for PBM games, the list of pros and cons usually divides them quite accurately,

for where one is good at one aspect of gaming, the other is not. Below I have listed both, including only the pros for each of the options. By reversing the statement, the bad points should be obvious. For example, if computers are listed as giving a faster turnaround, then humans will be slower.

Computers offer:

- \* On average, a faster turnaround per hundred players (where turnaround is the time you post your current move or 'turn', to the time it is delivered back to you by the whistling postman),
- \* Bigger games (both in terms of the number of people that can play concurrently and the physical size of the actual gaming area)
- \* A system well-suited to coping with the mathematics and data handling involved in wargaming and strategic simulations
- \* An accurate gamesmaster (with the only errors being in the inputting of each set of commands and program bugs)
- \* A dependable service (it is more commercially viable to run games by computer, so it is more likely to be around for a little longer)

Humans offer:

- \* Vast flexibility (limited only by the games-master and/or players imagination)
- \* A system well-suited to coping with the creative writing and endless options of role-playing games
- \* A more personal service (with a smaller group of players, you don't feel like a statistic in the company's bank balance)
- \* A way to weave a more subtle, less mechanical game that incorporates true stories and true characters

## SETTING

When looking at the great range of games currently available, my personal view is that these can really be divided into five headings. Admittedly these are vague (and therefore restrictive too) and that quite a few games do not fall under these titles, but it should give a good enough idea of what is generally on offer. In choosing from this section, the knack is to let yourself be drawn into whatever field most interests you. As they follow the major areas of book classification, and adventure game classification at that, it should not be difficult to decide which suits your taste:

- \* Science Fiction - be Dan Dare or Luke Skywalker in the middle of a galactic war or visiting planets in the galaxy
- \* Fantasy - join a company of men and women as Frodo or quest after the lairs of dragons
- \* Present Day - gamble on the Stock Market or run your own football team
- \* Past - fight battles in history as Napoleon or Boadicea,
- \* Future - get to grips with life as a cop in the 21st century or fight World War III

## TOPIC

Again, I have split these categories into five, as each has its own distinctive following and flavour. They are:

- \* Power Game - in which there is a definite goal, usually involving warring and diplomacy
- \* Sports Simulation - without moving from your armchair, you can delve into sports from Soccer to games like Rollerball
- \* Crime Game - a topic which covers gang warfare in the Roaring 20s to futuristic crime rings on the streets of New York.
- \* Role-Playing Game - a game where you create and develop a persona in another world

So there you have a quick reference guide to choosing which sort of game to get involved in. In coming issues, I will be highlighting various games from each of these groups which will hopefully give an indication of the many aspects of postal gaming - and until you try you have never valued your letterbox!

### MAIN AREAS COVERED BY PLAY-BY-MAIL GAMES

#### MODERATION

Computer                      Human

#### SETTING

Science Fiction      Fantasy      Present Day      Past  
Future

#### TOPIC

Power Game      Sports Simulation      Crime Game  
Role-Playing Game

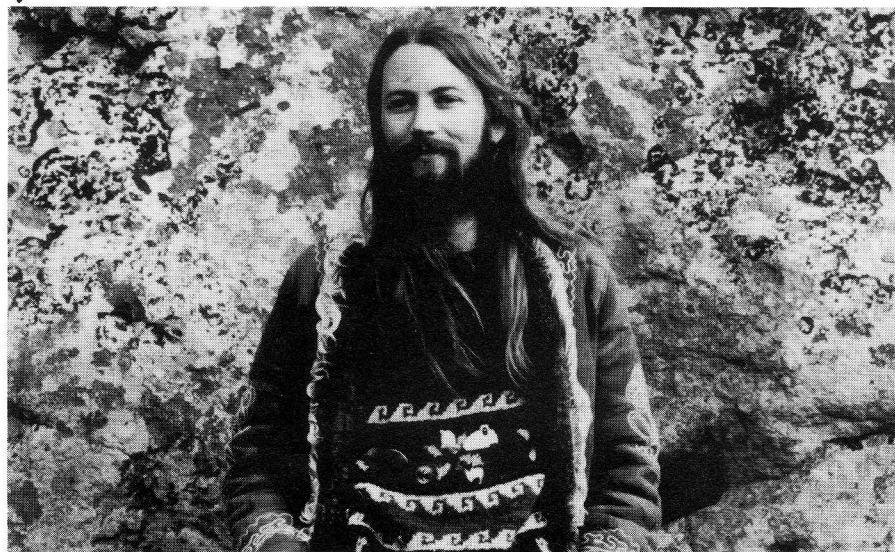


...WITH AGENT KANE GONE, WE WILL HAVE TO FIND SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE HER PRESTIGIOUS POSITION...WELL VOLUNTEERED AGENT CANNON!

Erm...Well...Erm...Hello. I seem to have volunteered for the job of...erm...doing this Personnel File thingy...Well, I guess it would be a good idea to have a look in the old padlocked file...Ah, it's empty...Ah...(long pause)...Well, here I am. Back to square one. Still, I'm sure I can think up someone to be in it... Hmm...(noises of thinking and general rustling of papers)...Oh, well, it looks like it's back to crawling around in the dustbins of the rich and famous and see what I come up with...



# JEFF MINTER



**How did you get involved in your current field of work?** After getting the KO from Uni, then getting ill, figured I could hack it as a game designer, had loads of ideas and nothing to lose!

**What would you be doing if you were not running Llamasoft?** Probably working for someone, but I can't imagine I'd be doing 9-to-5 stuff. Anyway, I don't run Llamasoft, my mum does. I just design and program.

**If you like, you could tell us a bit about the history of Llamasoft** Llamasoft was formed in 1982, which makes it a veteran in the games and software business. Its founder, Jeff Minter (that's me), is the creator of all its products, which fall into two categories - Computer Games and Light Synthesisers. Many of the games have been milestones in games design - *Gridrunner*, *Hover Bovver*, *Ancipital*, *Batalyx*, *Iridis Alpha* and the *Mutant Camels* series.

The Light Synthesisers, *Colourspace* and *Trip-A-Tron*, allow the user to play the computer like a 'light piano', creating visual effects which are a marvellous accompaniment to

music. *Trip-A-Tron* is not only great entertainment, it is a new tool for the creative artist.

**Where did your passion for llamas develop?** Developed out of an enduring passion for camels in about 1980.

**What music do you like?** Ah, now there's a question. PINK FLOYD, Genesis, Yes, Marillion, you know all the typical hippy stuff, plus loads of Heavy Metal, plus good synth stuff, Tange, Jarre, Vangelis, you know the form. And Talking Heads.

**What are you currently working on? Or have just finished? Can you leak any of your plans for the future?** Just finished *Andes Attack*, currently programming *Gridrunner* on the ST. Plans for work on the Konix Konsole and some more ST blasters.

**Do you have any pets?** Yes, one Siamese cat, Denis, and two sheep, Molly and Flossie.

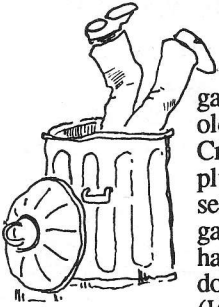
**If you had three wishes, what would you use them for?** An endless supply of Smart Bombs, a unified and peaceful planet and make Pink Floyd immortal.

**Last issue, we did a feature on Incentive and Sean Ellis mentioned**

you and a meeting when you previewed *Colourspace* to him. What do you recall of their visit to your offices (as this should explain his comments about sitting astride sheep-shaped chairs)? As I remember it, a few years ago while I was still living in Tadley, I had to go into Reading to buy a C-128D, and while I was in the shop plying the plastic, I bumped into one of the Incentive guys. One thing led to another, and I ended up in a pub with the Incentive team. I was telling them about *Colourspace* and such was my earnestness to fully explain my concept that I invited them all back for a demo. Back at my place we had perfect conditions for a demo, my workroom having such delights as a *Star Wars* machine, an eight-foot video screen hooked up to an ST, a very loud stereo and the aforementioned sheep-shaped stools (and the Yak on wheels). I had, at the time, prepared a demo light-synth show to *Dark Side Of The Moon*, so, as we were all in a suitably inebriated state, I let them have it on the 8-foot screen. I'm fairly certain that a splendid time was had by all and if the experience helped turn Incentive on to the ST and led indirectly to the creation of excellent stuff like *STAC*, then I'm especially happy that we had that little chance encounter.

**Have you ever been involved in adventure games? Do you like them? If not, then what are your tastes in games?** I have played adventures off and on over the years, having started on some old Scott Adams ones on cartridge on the Vic-20! However I would not describe myself as an adventure nut, I still play a lot more 'video' games. Some adventures, like *HitchHikers*, I have never finished but enjoy periodically returning to. Although I like arcade games, I have little time for 'mindless' blasters and Rambo-type kill-humans games. I like blasters with a strategic element, where the enemies have individual characteristics you have to learn and respond to, rather than the sort of mindless shooter where the enemies appear in the same 'attack patterns' every go. I like 'puzzle-arcade' type





games. I loved *Bombuzal*, an excellent puzzle game invented by my old mate Tony Crowther (plug plug). I am very selective about the games I play and have maybe half-a-dozen 16-bit regulars (*Virus*, *Starglider II*,

my own *Andes Attack*...). I enjoy some of the excellent Japanese arcade/adventures on the PC Engine - these are often challenging, have plenty of puzzles and great graphics and very large maps (*Legendary Axe* is ace!).

**Can you explain a typical day in the life of Jeff Minter?** Usually get conscious by about half-ten AM. If I oversleep generally Denis my cat comes and miaows me awake anyway. Get up and first thing I do is feed the sheep, collect the mail and come back in for a cup of tea and a read of the papers. After a while begin to feel truly conscious and go into the workroom and fire up the ST. Programming then ensues until *Neighbours* at 5.30, with occasional breaks to think (design is aided by pauses for tea and some loud CD) and maybe even a snatch of PC-Engine if the assembly times are getting long. After *Neighbours* I feed myself, junk food, no red meat, anything I can bung in the microwave. Feed Denis also (Brekies and Wiskas). Then back to the assembler, not so intense as before, half an eye on the TV for anything interesting. At 10 o'clock I decide to either go down 1 or 2 AM unless I have a deadline or am really into something. Finish off with loud CDs and some video games. This routine changes in summer. I like to be outdoors when the weather is good and I live in a beautiful area of Wales, so in the day I may go out for a walk or to the beach and do more work at night time. Basically, I am fortunate to be able to earn money doing work when I want, where I want. Consequently I work longer and harder than I ever would if I were an 'employee' or coding someone else's license.

**In your Newsletter, *The Nature Of The Beast*, you use quite a few words that I cannot find in my Chamber's Dictionary. Would you care to explain to our readers such**

**gems as:**  
**wazzo** (as in 'a truly wazzo device'): Wonderful, amazing, awesome. Word stolen from Alex Blok (Tecnation).

**A Yupmaster Filofaxiol ring-binder thingy:** Compound term meaning 'binder of Filofax-compatible type'.

**twaddle:** Nonsense, claptrap, drivel, rubbish. Ancient colloquialism.

**zarjaz:** Great, groovy, froody, cool. Originated by Tharg (*2000AD*).

**Naff-Off button:** A slightly more relaxed Quit button.

**totally wicked rastar control routines:** Flexible, powerful program module for changing colours at any position on the ST's screen, thereby extending the number on-screen.

**detecol stuff:** Collision detection code.

**Ghod:** anybody's God.

**Yak products (and non-Yak products while you're at it!):** game written by me and sold via Llamasoft (Non-Yak is not this)

**munchies** (as in 'when you've got the munchies'): Uncontrollable snack attack at weird hours of the day.

**heavy metal zap freak:** The sort of person who likes playing *Star Gate* in a darkened room with *Iron Maiden* going at full volume.

**fooberolity** (love this one especially!): Frivolity, foolish act. Derived from *Foobrol*, which means 'an uncharacteristic or purely silly action whilst under the influence of an intoxicant!'

**And on that note, this is Agent Cannon signing out!**

## MINTER

**First Names:** Jeffrey Charles

**Date of Birth:** 22-4-1962

**Star Sign:** Taurus

**Place of Birth:** Berkshire

**Height:** 6' 1"

**Weight:** 10.5 stones

**Colour of Hair:** Sort of llama-coloured

**Colour of Eyes:** Grey-green (mostly grey)

with white bits round the edges and a black hole in the middle

**Educated:** To a certain extent. 7 O-levels,

3 A-levels (Maths, Physics and English!), kicked out of U.E.A. (Norwich University)

**Occupation:** Digital Magician

**Likes:** Beasties, rock music, tea, the PC Engine, video games in general, the idea of Cyberspace, fractals, loadsamoney, sci-fi, louder rock music, ski-ing, CDs, transputers, Wales, Inca Kola and Peru, Atari

**Dislikes:** Hype, junk software, closing time, nukes, cheese, grated cow, Thatcherism, the Amiga operating system

**Favourite food:** Tuna-fish sarnies

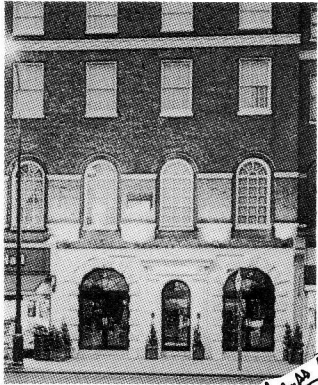
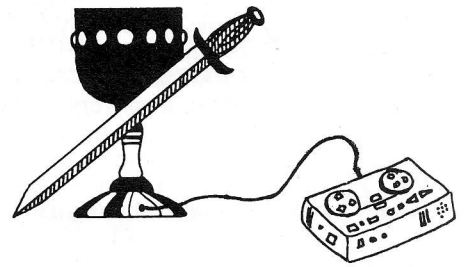
**Pastimes:** Game-playing and design, rock music (listening, not playing), light synth and *Neighbours*





...I HEAR THAT THOSE ROTTERS FROM THE ADVENTURERS CLUB ARE HAVING THEIR AWARDS CEREMONY...GET A SPY DOWN THEIR IMMEDIATELY...JOLLY GOOD SHOW...

# THE GOLDEN CHALICE AWARDS 1989



Just down the road from 221B Baker Street stands the Sherlock Holmes Hotel, a Georgian reminder of that most famous of detectives. It seems unlikely that Conan Doyle could have envisaged his deer-stalked hero ever spawning such a prestigious building, or any of the other shops and restaurants that bear his name. Baker Street is one long list of references to the books, their settings and their characters, but then again, there are few media who do not turn their attentions to this famous character. Films, books, board games, radio and television plays, all have seen the light of day but only for the continuing popularity of Sherlock Holmes, and the computer adventure scene ranks highly amongst these. The original (or not so original) stories translate easily into the limiting parameters of an adventure game. So it seems perhaps a well-chosen setting to announce the Golden Chalice Awards of 1989.

For the uninitiated, these awards are voted for by The Adventur-

er's Club and as far as I am aware, the largest vote for adventure games in Britain. They represented this year just over 600 votes, collected from the members of the Club. The venue was perfect, if a little sparse of actual members to the Club, but the adventure columnists were there in force, rubbing shoulders with the games designers and publishers in a relaxed atmosphere.

I mingled with the crowd, trying to squint at their badges, keeping in mind that a lot of these people were just voices on the other end of the telephone to

me. It was good to put some faces to the disembodied voices. There was a free glass of wine and an adequate buffet and the evening passed with a sly pace that took everyone by surprise. I talked with Pete Austin, who hinted that there was going to be a third Ingrid adventure, so I would guess this will be appearing in a triple pack soon too! Paul Findley was also present (missing the presentation of the Magnetic Scrolls award by mere hours). I spoke to him about Myth and various other topics after the awards ceremony. The results are entered below for your information...

## The Awards

**Mail Order Company Of The Year** (presented by Tony Bridge) - Zenobi Software.

**Golden Shield Award. Mail Order Adventure Of The Year** - *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Lee Hodgson) The Essential Myth.

**Commended Adventures Of The Year** (presented by Dave Baker) - *Lancelot* by Level 9 and *Beyond Zork* by Infocom.

**Golden Sword Award - Recognition Of Role-Playing In Computer Games** (presented by Ken Matthews): *Dungeon Master* by Mirrorsoft/FTL.

**National Software Company Of The Year** (presented by Mike Gerrard) - Magnetic Scrolls.

**The Fellowship Of The Adventurer's Club** - The Austin Family.

**The Chalice Awards** (presented by Keith Campbell) - **The Bronze Chalice Award** - *Legend Of The Sword* by Rainbird/Silicon Software.

**Silver Chalice** - *Jinxter* by Magnetic Scrolls/Rainbird.

**Golden Chalice** - *Ingrid's Back* by Level 9.

...AGENT TREVILLIAN, I SEEM TO REMEMBER YOU PROMISED ME A SERIES OF THREE MULTI-USER GAMES...SO? WHERE IS IT?

The Boss was right. I had promised that my look on multi-user games should be a trilogy. And I guess I should deliver the goods. The first article focussed on an independant commercial game, the second gave light to a game available on a network, so the last should be purely a hobby. So I began digging and thanks to some helpful pointing in the right direction, Neil Newell told me about a man who would be able to help. Philip Cordrey is a man who has everything. He has a successful business, a house in the country and the sort of mischievous charm that comes from not really wanting to grow up. So what I hear you say, but so has Mickey Mouse. Ah, but I reply that he also has something that only a handful of other men have; his own world. And that world is the multi-user game:

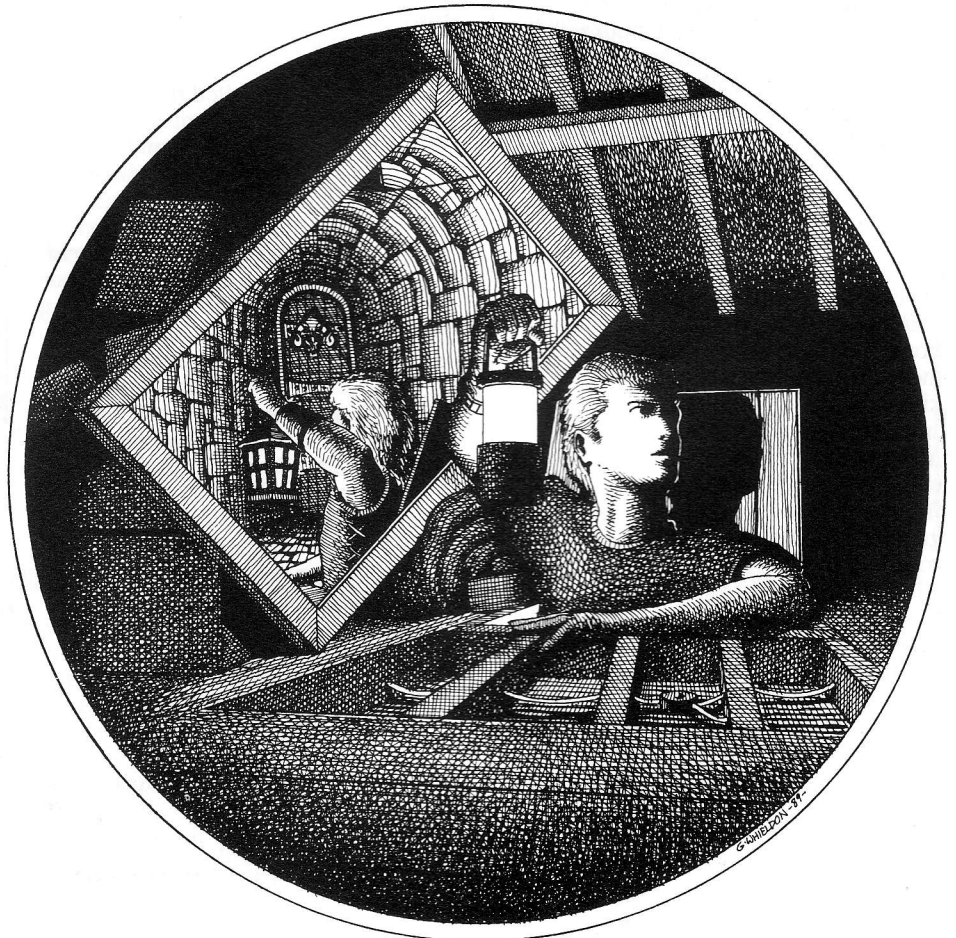
# MirrorWorld

Of course, no one can blame you for never having heard of *MirrorWorld* as it has never been highlighted much in the general press. The whole thing is run as a hobby and takes up a corner of Pip's home. (Pip by the way is Philip's persona in *MirrorWorld*, but more about that later on). Pip's involvement in multi-user technology began with a genuine interest for bulletin boards and has developed into a personal universe that fights to exist alongside the real world. It is made up of joys and sorrows, victories and defeats and one bleak Winter morning I found myself gazing spellbound through the window into this - for want of a better word - game.

Pip's bulletin board was called *Labbs* and, for it's time, was quite advanced, though now he would have to use the term 'primitive'. But such is progress. It was popular enough to warrant attention from quite a few people of the field and through this he met John Stewart who became part of an editing team for a part of *Labbs* dealing with *MUD*. At that time, the *Multi-User Dungeon* was in its unpredictable infancy at Essex University and so there was never any shortage of information on system improvements and crashes.

"*Labbs* was the place to look if *MUD* was down", Pip chortles merrily, "and soon there were a team of people working on that part of the BB." These all came from St Pauls School and slowly this group went on to form the six archwizards that oversee *MirrorWorld*.

As Pip saw the interest in multi-user games take a sharp increase, and presented with a complete team of people who were naturally keen and bright enough to undertake the challenge, he

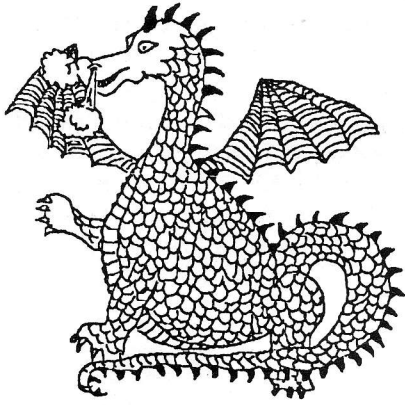


dreamt up the concept of a world that could be implemented on a home computer. The idea was to write a language that could be tailored to produce a sizeable adventure that would work as well as any mainframe scenario.

At first, there were problems. The idea was to use an ordinary BBC Micro, but for processing speed it just did not seem possible at all. So they

linked two Beebs and the rest was cobbled together. Memory was added via a 30 MB hard disk and the entire game was held in RAM which was souped up to 2 MB for the job. The channel between the two processors was called *Fastlink* and was capable of just about sixteen million baud rate! One Beeb controls the game and the other controls the ports that come in via the modems that line to shelves above the





computer desk.

In all this hive of activity, *Labbs* was closed down and *MirrorWorld* raised its head into the light of day. At first there were two lines, then six and now ten, as the popularity of the game grew and grew.

Due to the immense enjoyment Pip gets from the *Middle Earth* books, the environs of *MirrorWorld* are splashed with the colour of Tolkein's masterwork. The land is a place where the Lords Of Zeffre have fought in the past destroying what was once a beautiful land. Now the only places of old are the last bastions of the King; a temple, a fortress and a few other buildings are all that remains of the once expansive empire. The way in which points are gained is not revolutionary. Like all these sort of games, these are scored by solving puzzles, killing monsters and for selling treasures in the Trading Posts. Smatterings of other things that you have either read or seen creep into the land from all directions, yet the feeling you get is that you have visited this place sometime before. So is this why it is called *MirrorWorld*, because it mirrors aspects of everything else. Pip shakes his head.

"The name came after we decided to put an end to resets in the game." A reset, by the way, is when the game stops and everything returns to its original position, puzzles are returned to their starting positions and the game begins anew. "This is most annoying - and does nothing except drag you out of your fantasy world and plopp you right back into the real one. It is most annoying. In *MirrorWorld* this is not the case and the idea to get around this problem came from the film *West-World*. In that, all the game was only an elaborate illu-

sion, a facade behind which men in white coats kept everything under control. We all thought this was a wonderful idea and so we implemented it into the game."

I saw it in action. After half-solving a problem, a certain time elapses and if the puzzle remains unsolved, a man in a white coat comes by and returns it to its original state. To make sure that this can be monitored (by both players and Wizards), there are usually accompanying signs, like thunder-flashes, creaking doors, etc., to indicate that the puzzle has been reset. This means that there is no need to rush for treasure as it is going to come back in the end anyway.

This also means that *MirrorWorld* is an extremely tough game to play. You need a million points to reach Wizard status and inherit all the useful powers that you could merely dream after as a mortal. Yet there are such a daunting array of hazards, combining the standard adventure game with arcade timing and fiercesome monsters, that few have reached the exalted ranks so far.

The first was in May 1987 and even now there are only fourteen who have joined his ranks.

And unlike other games, *MirrorWorld* Wizards can die, although it would be absolutely unforgivable if one did. The Wizards themselves also are left in the dark about certain aspects of the game, to allow them to continue progressing and to keep the challenge of being one of the supervising hierachy in their hands. And *MirrorWorld* is never static.

One of the newest puzzles concerns a

very innocuous scarf and sets up a very interesting game of 'tag' amongst the players. For if anyone picks up the scarf it leaps out of their hands and wraps itself tightly around their neck, effectively suffocating them. Slowly their stamina ebbs, draining away until they have but one point. And the only way to relieve themselves of this is by giving it to another player. A nasty game ensues, especially as when a character quits in *MirrorWorld* everything is saved to a disk file., so if your persona is blinded, deafened, dumbbed and crippled and has been given the scarf to boot, they cannot just quit and reenter completely rejuvenated. Yet with this level of game, there are always ways to heal yourself without magic!

Pip also has ideas for making the game more fun for Wizards, so that certain puzzles and adventures could only be undertaken by them.

"It would be nice if all the fun did not stop once you attained the highest level in the game", Pip told me thoughtfully, "They could face whole new challenges beyond the ability of mortal folk. This could include a series of quests or similar, or a door through which only they could walk."

The idea is certainly an innovative one, but with the story of *MirrorWorld* completed, I found that this was only the tip of the iceberg. For when you dial into the game, there are also two other options on the menu, that of *Quest* and the Bulletin Board. These run beside the configuration of *MirrorWorld* and were both written by Phil Harling, who is only sixteen. Phil came into the fold when he wrote the new bulletin board that replaced

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND MIRRORWORLD

**Tim Rogers**, who along with Pip dreamt up the concept and language ideas.

**Nat Billington**, the Chief programmer who converted all into Machine Code and wrote the compiler and interpreter).

**Pat Bossert**, who put together the front end Multiplexor and then went on to design the full scale Multiplexor and Fastlink.

**Lorenzo Wood**, who was the communications genius responsible for the software for the whole front end and the telephone communications.

**Piers de Lavison**, who was the Chief Room Editor. He and Tim created adventure with significant inputs from all the rest of the team. I came under their stony eye.

And **Pip Cordrey**, who co-ordinated the whole affair and made sure that everything was consistent and generally provided the space, time and tea to get everything working.

## A sequence from *Quest* - showing Taliesin at work.

(This comes up as you stand within the Wizard's Magic Room)

Magic Room.

The room emits a light all of its own, its source indefinite but searing enough to make you cover your eyes with your arm. You can only make out some of the strange noises which are bubbling around this room. You see rows of herbs in glass jars, a simple hand-held harp, a cauldron, a piece of translucent amber and the Wizard Taliesin.

Taliesin quickly hurries out of the room.

Taliesin hustles in clutching some herbs and a potion.

Taliesin carefully puts the herbs in the cauldron.

Taliesin picks up his harp and begins strumming it softly.

Taliesin begins to sing solemnly about a worm.

Taliesin looks up at the cauldron and smiles. As you look in, you see the faint image of a worm encased in gold shimmering light.

The image of the worm begins to dissolve slightly, then suddenly the image vanishes altogether, leaving only Taliesin strumming his harp. He turns and says, "Creation is beautiful, isn't it?"



*Labbs* and then set to work on implementing his own multi-user game and converting it into 'C'.

"He is an extremely bright young man", comments Pip as we look over his creation, "It certainly is a step onward from the original game that he wrote, including some very imaginative features." I remarked that it was unusual to find a programmer who also had a flare for writing good story-lines.

*Quest* includes all the features of *MirrorWorld*, plus quite a few more. There is an on-screen update of the top twenty players that is generated automatically every few minutes, you can send messages across from *Quest* to *MirrorWorld* (and vice-versa I believe too), the weather system is fully implemented (so when it rains, you do not get wet inside buildings, but may hear the storm outside), there is a contest which can be run by the Wizards at the amphitheatre which includes betting points against the odds of a certain gladiator or creature fighting in the arena. But the thing that is most unique is that it has a strong storyline that makes the whole universe plausible. It is not just a case of dropping treasures in a swamp, or selling them to the Trading Post, giving them to some Mad King or whatever. In this game, the world revolves around Taliesin, who is a computer-generated Wizard who controls everything. He creates and recreates the world, keeping everything in check and making sure the whole fabric of reality is not breached by all these people running around tampering with everything. He has an apprentice (who is based upon the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*) to which the players have to give their findings. He

in turn takes them to Taliesin, who then returns them to the world anew. Giving the apprentice your hard-earned treasure though, is a little harder than you would at first envisage. You have to track him down, not an easy task in itself, and then you must get him to accept your items. As he bumbles about tripping over his robes, he is as likely to drop the treasure or give it back as he is to keep it!

And leaving fantasy aside for a moment, Pip has yet to complete his science fiction game, known at the moment as *Spaces*. It is set in a space station orbiting earth that has remained derelict for years. Aliens have come to inhabit the place and also a band of 'Mad Max' type vagrants who are set against just about anyone they meet. The idea behind the game is to repair and collect new parts for the station and make in habitable. Although still in its infancy, the game will add another dimension to the growing world of Pip Cordrey and, who knows, one day you may meet him in one of the games he has created. And if you do, say Trevillian sent you...

The numbers to call are 0883-844044 or 0883-0883844164.



## BUGS FILE



This issue we open the dossier on all the reported quirks, bugs and inconsistencies in your favourite adventure games. This will hopefully grow into a useful list of all those annoying little bits in every game.

### FISH!

In the sound recording studio through the jagged warp, do not enter Put Tape In Player else you will not be able to take it out. Instead type Play tape in player.

### BEYOND ZORK

If you sell the butterfly in the shop with the chalice in it, then the butterfly will fly back and settle on the chalice. Take the butterfly and sell it again, thus increasing your money by any amount. It starts at 5 zorkmids, but will increase as you go on!

In *Beyond Zork* too, the parser doesn't understand 'horse' in the section with the two princes. This at first seems like a big problem, but in fact the solution does not revolve around manipulating the horse in any way, so this is really only a minor oversight on Infocom's part really.

### JINXTER

At the end of the game, there is no way to avoid being run over, so if you have not got a full score, this is not the reason.

Also due to the fact that you must be carrying something in order to play it, the programmers thought that it would be sensible to automatically pick up anything you wanted to play, such as the harmonica. But they forgot to check if the object was valid, so if you type 'Play the harmonica and dance', it will pick up the harmonica and play it, then pick up the dance and play that as well! This works with any word the vocabulary understands, so try 'play bus', 'play castle' or even 'play self', they will all appear on your inventory, but beware as you cannot drop any of these objects once they are there, but they do count towards your carrying capacity.

To add to this column, write to the usual address, marking the envelope: Bugs File



...WELL AT LEAST ONE OF YOUR IDEAS SEEMS TO BE WORKING... OUR AGENTS ARE CERTAINLY CALLING OUT FOR HELP... I CAN HEAR THEM NOW...

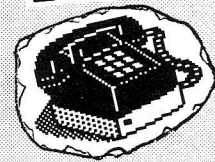
# DEAD LETTER BOX

Back by popular demand, the noticeboard for contact between the agents of our Club. And for those newcomers who know nothing of this page, you can use it as a contact board for people in your area, for messages or any of the uses you see below. Unless otherwise specified, please send all answers and letters to: Dead Letter Box, including the notice code, to the magazine address.

## NEW MAGAZINE!

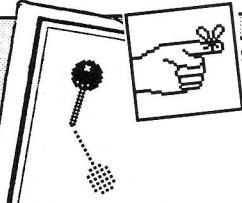
A new adventure magazine will be on sale from the 14th March 1989 @ £1.25 per issue or £5.00 per 4 month subscription. The magazine will include solutions, part solutions, maps, hints and tips, helpine, mazes solved plus much more. Approx. 40 pages, A5 style. For all makes of computer. Anyone wishing to purchase or contribute to this magazine, please contact:  
Mike Brailford, 19 Napier Place, South Parks, Glenrothes, Fife, KY6 1DX.  
All cheques or POs to be made payable to myself.  
Attention: First 24 subscribers receive a free game by John Wilson of Zenobi Software.

If anyone needs any testing done on any GAC adventures on the Amstrad CPC, then send them to:  
Mark, 22 Walnut Tree Way, Tiptree, Colchester, Essex, CO5 0NH.



The Thought Of The Day: Where has the circumflex gone out of rôle-playing?

## Wanted Urgently Solutions to Faery Tale and Golden Path



**STING**  
78 Merton Road, Highfield, Wigan.  
WN3 6AT  
Editor: Sandra Sharkey

STING is a new Club for Atari ST users. Its main aim is to bring together people with the same interests.  
There will be eight newsletters per year.  
The newsletters will be split into sections as follows:  
◊ LETTERS Where you can voice your opinion on the ST scene  
◊ ADVENTURES Reviews, hints, tips, the occasional maps and solutions  
◊ ROLE PLAYING GAMES Reviews, hints, tips and occasional maps  
◊ HELP WANTED. Stuck in a game? Need some programming help?  
◊ UTILITIES. These will also be covered. Things like STOS, STAC, WP's etc  
◊ PIC 'N' MIX PUBLIC DOMAIN. PD with a difference. You send in a disk and choose all the programs to go on the disk. If you don't have a spare disk then you can buy one from STING.  
◊ STINGWARE Where you can sell or buy programs/games written by members. Full details in the first issue of the newsletter.  
◊ CLASSIFIED ADS Sell your unwanted software here (originals only). Full bargain.  
COMMISSION. You can earn £1 cash for every new member you introduce.  
MEMBERSHIP. The membership year is from January to December 1989, with discounts for members who join later in the year.  
PD DISK. All members who join for a full twelve month period will have the option of receiving a PD disk.  
COST. Membership for one year costs £15 with PD disk or £12.95 for the newsletters only.

Agent Goodger asks if anyone has any sort of solution to Starflight? When the space station blows up, is that the end of the game? And if so, how come he can still wander around? Hints and tips welcome.

A big thanks to everyone who phoned, wrote and otherwise put themselves out to help last issue's Dead Letter Boxers! Keep it up.

TBU. HELP!

...HELP...I'M LOST IN THE DIMENSIONS!...AND ALL THE EXITS KEEP CHANGING...GET ME SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP ME OUT!...

But where to look for someone who has the experience and ability to explain the basics to everyone who still fumbles around with a scrappy piece of borrowed notepaper and an orange crayon. The number of people who do not even bother with mapping is still fairly high and usually follows the same number who do not finish games as they didn't know that the hall they were standing in was made up of two locations instead of one! So, from amongst our members, we have found someone to bring you the (naturally) incomplete guide to...

# MAPPING YOUR ADVENTURE

A GUIDE BY JOHN R. BARNESLEY

## INTRODUCTION

It is essential to maintain a clear record of your progress in a tidy and readily accessible manner. I have used a simple system of A4 sheets that has served me well over the years.

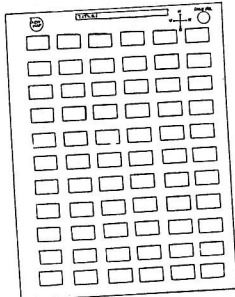


Figure 1.

This 'system' allows for clear recording of:

- (1) Exact location with brief description
- (2) Objects found
- (3) Characters encountered
- (4) Available exits from each location
- (5) 'Conditional' exits
- (6) Compass heading
- (7) Sheet numbering
- (8) Random elements
- (9) Basic Mazes

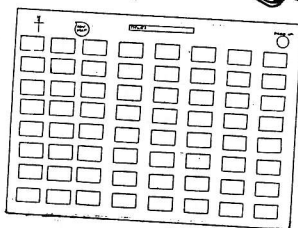


Figure 2.

### Map design

This inexpensive and simple system is described in more detail shortly. Beforehand, however, it must be appreciated that very few adventure programs give a hint to the player as to the number of locations to be found. Whilst it is reasonable to expect a Level 9 adventure to offer in excess of 190 locations, the majority of games fall within the 75-125 location range.

Indeed, many adventures have very few locations with many more problems, but this by no means implies that

the larger adventure is short of puzzles! Experience will tell you what to expect from a particular software house or writer.

To help you in forming an effective map system I have designed a basic A4-size sheet - of TWO designs - which will provide for the vast majority of your needs during the course of the game, with most of your 'education' recorded on a single sheet! The two basic sheets are in vertical and horizontal format, as depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

Sufficient space should be allowed around the perimeter of each sheet to provide for the insertion of adjoining sheet markers. It is advisable to draw carefully one copy of each of your two MASTER sheets and photocopy a supply for actual use. The cost is usually minimal.

Each working sheet should be uniquely numbered or lettered for identification during play. It is difficult to advise on the insertion of your FIRST location but a general rule is to commence as near as possible to the centre of a horizontal unused sheet. This can be adjusted as the layout of your adventure map becomes clearer.

### (1) Exact location

Insert a brief title of the location. At first, in some adventures, the first few brief locations may all seem alike but in the main all descriptions differ slightly, ie. Rocky Plain, Rock Strewn Plain, etc.

Desert, forest, jungle and cave-tunnel locations are sometimes deliberately included to confuse you, in the form of a maze and will thus have the same location description. You should read the text description of your current location very carefully as there may be a subtle difference in the wording which is easily missed by a cursory glance, ie. Twisty Little Passage, Twisting Little passage. Basic maze mapping will be covered fully later, so don't dwell on it at this stage.

### (2) Objects found

Carefully note in each location box any particular objects found. Enclose these items in the brackets so as not to get confused with the location description when you come to study your map again some time later.

Try not to fill the box with useless items - include ONLY those which are likely to serve a purpose in your quest, unless of course it helps you to differentiate between similar location descriptions! Examination of some objects may give a clue as to their future use or otherwise.

Naturally, with many adventures, some objects do not manifest themselves until you carry out a particular task beforehand. An example of this is a knife hidden in a drawer, or BEHIND it! In these cases it may be to your advantage to note the drawer (or table/cupboard containing the drawer) to enable you to remember that there is something hidden in THAT particular location.

### (3) Characters encountered

Note the location of EVERY character - alive or dead - that you come across as even dead characters may have a use, ie. wearing special clothing, concealing an object(s), food source for monsters/plants, etc.

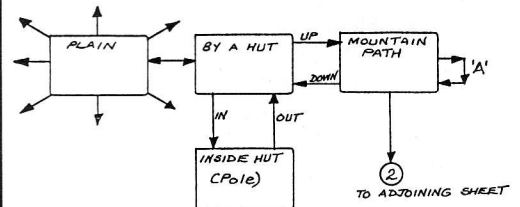


Figure 3.

### 3

Please bear in that some characters are there to kill you or otherwise impede your progress, so try to avoid the nasty ones if at all possible - sometimes you are allowed just one move to run away - talking may also help but don't bank on it.

Be prepared for random appearances - SAVE GAME often - these usually occur within set area of your adven-



ture so mark the boxes within that area with a small asterisk and add a brief note of the situation on your map sheet. There is usually a way around these characters but you need to find the necessary items or learn spells/words to overcome them. Avoiding them temporarily gives you time to search and think.

(4) Available exits from each location  
Indicate every possible exit from each location: north, south, east, west, northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast, in, out, up and down (as shown in Figure Three).

After entering a directional command, try moving in the opposite direction to ensure that you return to the previous location - if you don't, however, carefully note where this move takes you. It may be the start of a maze (see maze mapping notes) or simply that you stay in your original location! The O.K. response from the program doesn't help you in this respect. Check the location description carefully and also the exit options and if this is so then mark it as at 'A' in Figure 3.

A number of adventures have deliberate one-way routes so be careful. Furthermore you should also be aware of the inescapable dead-end trap - again SAVE your game often.

Show also where your current map is continued on a further sheet.

(5) Conditional commands  
You may be prevented from progressing in a particular direction until you have satisfied certain pre-conditions such as possessing certain objects, attaining a defined score or performing specific tasks beforehand.

Of course, the simple action of not opening a door may also prevent progress. I remember a relatively simple problem, when I first started adventuring, which baffled me for hours - that of trying to move in a direction when all that was required was the command 'Go DOOR' or 'GO BUILDING'... Scott Adams, you caught me!

A 'conditional' exit should be indicated on your map by a broken or dotted line to differentiate these and 'normal' directional exits. You should also show any precise wording necessary, ie. 'GO ENTRANCE', 'BOARD SHIP', etc. Believe me, it is all too easy to miss this important point.

(6) Compass heading  
Your master sheets should include a simple compass symbol and your location directions should strictly comply with this. It may be necessary, to economise on space or avoid using a

completely fresh sheet for just one location, to disobey this rule slightly. In this case always start your directional line correctly and add the true directional letter, as shown in Figure 4.

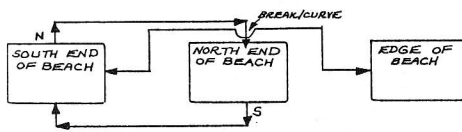


Figure 4.

A small problem may arise when using this method, where further location is, to use the example, directly east. You can by-pass the location you have drawn as shown. To keep things tidy always 'break/curve' a route when it crosses the path of another. A complex map can easily be condensed within a small area this way yet still remain clear to the eye.

(7) Sheet numbering  
Simply number (or letter) your map sheets in sequence. Show exactly where a map route leaves one sheet and, more importantly, where it joins another. If you are taken to a distant part of the adventure as you move off the current sheet then indicate which sheet you will progress to. Similarly on the 'new' sheet show where you came from. All this is very basic stuff but can save hours of frustration when you return to your adventure in a few days.

Try to keep all directional routes in a 'true' line, ie. north as in Figure 5.

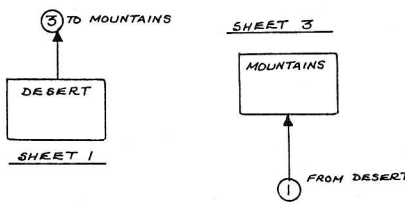


Figure 5.

(8) Random elements  
The previous map-making comments (1-7) will apply to approximately 80% of adventure games. However, you will also encounter, sooner or later, the infamous 'random-chance' element.

In particular 'Worm in Paradise' (level 9) can be extremely confusing, even when you believe that you have mastered the Eden Transport System. This is because certain elements of this adventure are randomly generated upon EACH loading! This gives a different set of conditions each time you

play, in certain locations of the game. Another fine example is 'The Hobbit' (Melbourne House) where you need to perform a certain task or action before a particular map route is even created!

(9) Basic Mazes  
The best way to cover this aspect of adventure mapping is to use what is referred to as 'Standard Procedure'.

Bear in mind that some mazes may be randomly generated and are therefore impossible to map accurately.

So, what is a maze? Essentially it is a group of locations incorporated into an adventure in a usually successful attempt to confuse the player's sense of direction and current whereabouts. Sometimes you may be lucky and discover that movement in the opposite direction to your last move places you exactly where you were previously. This type is, therefore, not so much a maze as a set of similarly described locations - the Marsh in 'Bored Of The Rings' is a good example of the latter.

The true maze places you in a completely different location when you reverse your previous directional command, sometimes quite a considerable distance from where you thought you were!

Once you have established where the maze was first encountered, go through your game once more and SAVE just prior to that stage, taking careful stock of your current inventory.

Standard Procedure  
The simplest way to accurately map a standard maze is to drop one of your carried (or worn) items in each location as you progress, collecting them again by following your new map when you have completed the maze section of your adventure.

You may only be carrying four or five items at this stage but, usually, this is enough. Be especially careful to retain your lamp as it may be dark in there and if it isn't then maybe night will fall while you're in there. Also, any fragile objects may need some form of 'cushion' before you drop them to prevent accidental damage.

Let us assume a hypothetical situa-

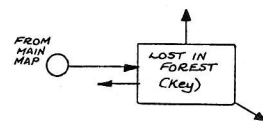


Figure 6.

tion. You are carrying a sword, stick, knife, key and lamp. You are also wearing a cloak. The maze consists of a so-far unknown number of locations. When you reach your first maze location, DROP the key and write the location description in your location box - pencilling in the key for now. Indicate all the visible exits from this location (your first maze location should now be shown as in figure 6).

Incidentally, this 'maze section' of your map should be constructed on a separate piece of paper to avoid confusion.

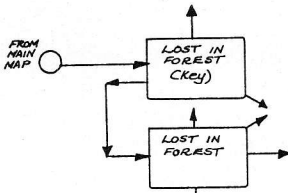


Figure 7.

Now leaving the key where it is, move west. Oh, great! We're lost! Or so it seems, Note that the description of this new location and we find it is exactly the same, but without the key. Draw in this new location and note the visible exits (your map should now conform to Fig 7).

Now drop the stick and write it down in pencil in this new location. You do not need to know the exits as this mapping method works either way; we simply try to move in every possible direction, indicated or otherwise, until successful.

Assuming that you cannot move west, let's try north. If you see a key then simply draw your directional line to join the first location. For the purpose of this example we see not a key but a stick. You really haven't moved out of the location at all! Show this fact, leaving the stick where it is, on your map maze (fig 8).

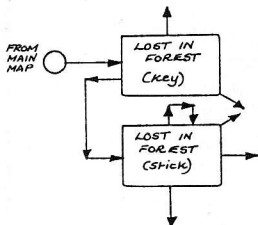


Figure 8.

Now try northwest and you find a convenient clearing. This, so far, is a completely different location description and there is no need to drop an item in this location. But you should still note all the visible exits (fig 9).

Continue around the maze using the

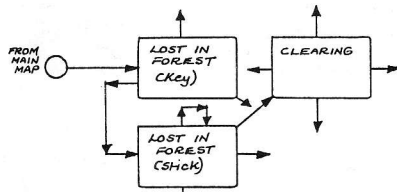


Figure 9.

adopted procedure until all maze locations have been shown and all possible directions followed. Our hypothetical maze now conforms to Figure 10. Looks quite complicated doesn't it? But study it closely. It really is quite simple! You see, you could have been wandering around for quite a while - getting hungry and tired, lamp running low - yet there are only four 'Lost in Forest' locations.

Now follow your new map and collect your dropped items, erasing the pencilled notes and continue with your quest.

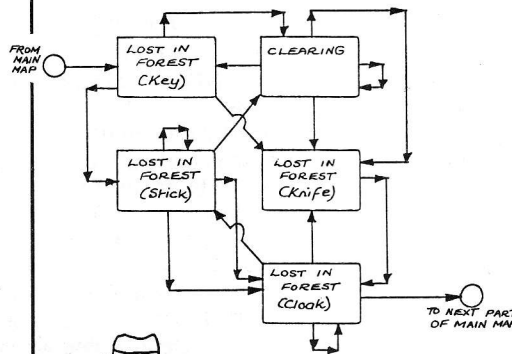


Figure 10.

I only wish every maze was as simple as this - sometimes it appears more daunting than it actually is! Consider the 'Maze of Sodden Hillocks' (sic) contained in *The Shadows Of Mordor* (Melbourne House) - just three locations (fig 11). You can see that the majority of directional commands do not actually take you anywhere. As a point of interest this particular maze was mapped by adopting the standard procedure, before the necessary action was taken to move the logs, whilst the 'dark' mazes in the same adventure were similarly tackled but with the various permutations of matches and crystal to provide light.

In the main, mazes are extremely difficult to map, with other factors to contend with, such as:

- (a) limited number of moves,
- (b) darkness
- (c) randomly generated directions,
- (d) your dropped objects being covered by mist or smoke...or even washed away.

In conclusion, I would stress that this

article is not intended to teach you all you need to know about adventure

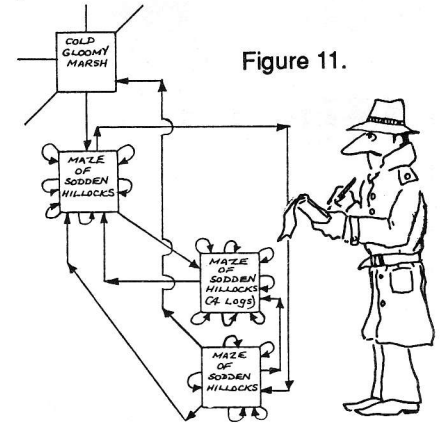


Figure 11.

mapping. It is merely a collation of my own personal methods and offered as a basis for individual adaptation according to needs.

Finally, remember this: your adventure map is only as good as the next time you need to use it!

### EXCLUSIVE!

Videotronics of Boston have finally solved the problem of incompatibility between computers. They've produced a disk drive containing slots for 5.25 and 3.5 disks. The drive, which is code-named "Quasi" has 1 megabyte of ROM containing allegedly legal emulation software for Macintosh, Atari ST, Amiga and IBM PC. A simple switch on the front of the drive can set the disk to run any software on any of the four machines. The system can also load incompatible software onto any hard disk connected to the host computer and run it under emulation from the hard disk. In the UK at around £600. Videotronics claim to also be developing an intelligent Software Emulation (SE) package which will be issued on both 3.5" and 5.25" disks. The user places the original software in one slot of the Quasi Drive and the SE disk in the other. A blank disk is placed in the computer's normal drive. The SE package then calculates an emulation for the original software and this is then written to the blank disk. A spokesman for the company confirmed that the new copy could not be considered a pirate copy as the whole code would have been rewritten by the SE package. The third part of the package, known as the Head Master (HM) will require the user to play an original game just once. Then the HM will take control and play the game time and time again until the perfect score is achieved, saving the user a great deal of time effort and energy. Videotronics describe HM as "foolproof!"

**Agent Orange.**



...AHH...IT'S GOOD TO SEE THE BESTIARY FILE BACK AGAIN...AT LEAST IT SHOULD KEEP OUR AGENTS ALIVE FOR A LITTLE LONGER...

# The Bestiary File

## THE DRAGON (*Drago Diabolius*)

*The Pawn, DungeonMaster, Heroes Of The Lance, Legend Of The Sword, Shadowgate, Bard's Tale I, Zork II, The Hobbit, Etc...*



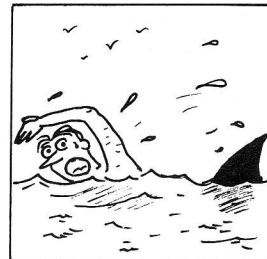
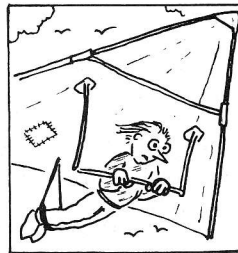
- SPECIES:** Reptilian
- ORIGIN:** Egg-hatched
- DIMENSIONS:** Length: Ranging from ten to one hundred metres in length (from nose to tail); Height: Ranging from one to thirty metres.
- DIET:** Ravenous carnivore (Virgin maiden flesh a speciality)
- HABITAT:** Various (see below)
- POPULATION DENSITY:** Very Rare
- GROUPING NUMBER:** Usually solitary (on rare occasions family groups can be encountered underground)
- LAIR:** Various (see below)
- LIFESPAN:** Unrecorded (many hundreds of years)
- LOCOMOTION:** Four powerful five-toed legs
- REPRODUCTION:** They are known to mate on the wing
- MATING SEASON:** Once every ten years
- SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:** Loners
- COMMUNICATION:** Deafening roaring (though some can talk and even cast spells)
- INTELLIGENCE:** Ranging from animal to genius (all Dragons have a very high level of cunning)

Few Adventurers care to discover firsthand more about the diverse and magical nature of the creature known as the Dragon. Most people avoid them., or -failing that - try to kill them. Yet curiosity has always been a trait of all the races and so a few facts have been collected together on the subject of these most ancient and magnificent of beasts. Classification of all the differing types of Dragons has been an impossible task (mainly because nearly all the classifiers were eaten upon close perusal). There are five main dwelling places where these creatures dwell: Caves are always much sought after and they prefer dank, cold darkness which is easily guarded (see *The Pawn* and *The Hobbit*). Mountains lairs should be high and inaccessible, so they can swoop on their unsuspecting victims. Water, both fresh and salty, is a less common dwelling place for Dragons, as they have little use for air and can survive submerged for days on end. Swamps are the next most common refuges as the combination of water and land make marshes a good haven. The last place where Dragons are encountered are in dungeons, enslaved by mighty Wizards to guard valuable treasures (as in *DM*). So all in all, Dragons should be approached with care, yet before closing, there is a trait which some Dragons show and this is the fact that when a Dragon sees its reflection, it will attack it unceasingly until the image is destroyed (*LOTS* and *Zork II*).

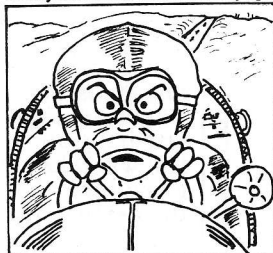
**LEATHER SUIT BIXBY GOES LOOKING FOR LOVE WITH A BOX OF CHOCOLATES**



After an invitation from an unknown admirer, Bixby sets off to deliver a very special box of chocolates.



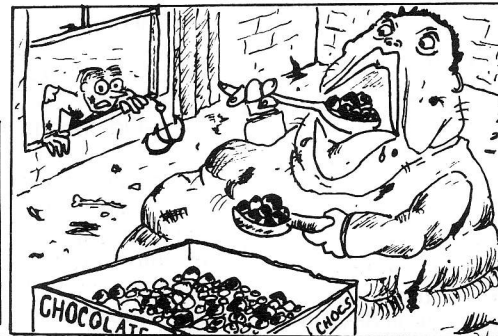
His trek takes him through the air... ..across shark-infested seas...



...zooming along in his leather buggy at break neck speed...



...and finally scaling the cliffs of the lady's fortress home...

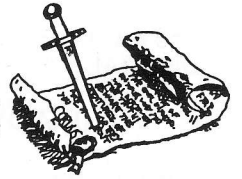


"Mmmm...(Chomp!)...MORE CHOCOLATES!... FEED ME MORE CHOCOLATES!!!...(Shovel)"

...AH, THE JOYS OF RUNNING AMOK IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE...IS THERE ANY MORE NEWS ON THIS ADVENTUROUS PASTTIME?...

**With orders from on high, my travels to the North of England were not complete with my look at last issue's goings on at TMill. Now I crossed the Pennines and made my way into a different domain. Here I found that Live Role-Players were catered for under another group, who emerged from the distant backwaters of the hobby to fuel and rekindle everyone's...**

# SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE



## THE INTERVIEW

The first thing about *Spirit Of Adventure* that everyone comments on is its age. Its origins hark back to a time when the thought of whacking anybody with a rubber sword was tantamount to pleading insanity. As I have mentioned in previous issues, the entire hobby grew from a group of people known as *Treasure Trap*. Holidays were run for a whole week and included staying at Peckforton Castle and participating in adventures every day. Well, perhaps holiday too strong a word, but the people who went enjoyed the experience and all was well and good, until *TT* closed down and a promising offshoot of the role-playing hobby seemed lost forever.

Yet soon groups all over the country began to start their own live role-playing ventures and one of these was *Spirit Of Adventure*. The founding members of *Spirit* all took their turn in the dungeons and corridors of *TT*, so they knew as much as anyone about setting up this sort of enterprise. Now three years later, I sat in a small tent on the edges of Tame Country Park talking to Pam Turnbull about what has happened to the once small group that was the original *Spirit*.

"We now have one indoor and nine outdoor locations which meet our requirements very well", she told me between the roars from outside of a party getting ready to head off on the evening jaunt, "We run adventures every weekend, three times a day and rotate the sites so as not to overly dis-

turb the public." And how do the general folk out walking their dog on a Saturday afternoon cope with all this activity? "The public cope very well. Some even follow us around. In fact, some even turn up the next week to try it out!"

Dusk was slowly turning to darkness now and outside the last of the voices from the party had died away. Through the window in the tent, which serves as a sort of command post and meeting point for the whole day's escapades, I watched their torchlights disappear over the hill. An breathtaking sight for a newcomer, but doesn't running such an endeavour pose a heavy commitment on the people behind it?

"I work every weekend", she explained, sounding naturally heroic, her upper lip stiffening visibly, "and am in charge of the administration for the whole group. When I am not doing that, I usually referee or monster. The job is tiring, but very rewarding." I commented that it would have to be.

As well as rotating the country parks, they also move indoors to Loks Works, an old run-down engineering building that no one wants, but is the perfect sight for ruins and dungeons. This gives the sort of variety that such a long-term enterprise needs to keep everything fresh and ticking over.

The people involved with *Spirit* are still the same as when the group first started and are made up of Steve Gibson, Shelley Gibson, Steve Turnbull

and Pam herself. And by the time this magazine arrives, they will have been in existence for three years. That's a lot of weekends to justify the reward. But then again, as someone remarked on the day, I'm not 'into it'.

The process of running a live role-playing group, like any specialist hobby, seems to follow the same basic requirements. Most are taken from the original ground rules and set-up of *Treasure Trap*, but this is the basis of common sense when you have to plan such an event. *Spirit's* own introduction to the system is called, naturally enough, *The Adventurers Guide* and is sent to every player who books for their first adventure.

Inside it touches upon all the basic requirements that you need to know about the system, from such simplicities as choosing a race to how the focussed and unfocussed magic system functions in our magicless world. The guide also familiarises you with the rudiments of combat, the special magical effects that you may encounter on your travels and those immortal referee's words that transcend each and every system I have seen; Time In Time Out and Time Freeze. For the uninitiated, I reproduce that part of the *Adventurers Guide*, just to show everyone what they are missing.

*Spirit* are also trying to get across an organised professional image of the hobby as a whole, for, though attitudes have changed, this 'sport' is still viewed at arm's length.

"We like to be strict on training", said Pam, turning my attention to the facts about the adventure had joined in with earlier that day (and which is detailed herein). "There are two people that travel with the group; one is the Battle-Boarder and the other is the Referee. Both have been recruited from our players and have been trained in using the system and aspects like knowledge of *The Country Code*." The monsters too have to be introduced and trained; no one can turn up and expect to play the part of a monster. Yet it is a good way to learn the system and certainly keeps you fit!

And for those of you who are interested in finding out more of the goings on



at *Spirit Of Adventure*, they can be contacted at: *Spirit Of Adventure*, 11 Huddersfield Road, Micklehurst, Mossley, OL5 9LD, or by telephoning (04575) 67924.

And remember to tell 'em that CONFIDENTIAL sent ya!

**THE ADVENTURE  
(Or 'How Unmuddy the Mage Found That Reporting And Adventuring Do Not Mix' or 'How Can You Tell What Is Going On If You Are Writing Everything Down?' or 'The Mud Was Really Interesting')**

Dear Editor,  
I was Unmuddy, a Mage. I was stood amidst a motley crew of vile scum and vermin. Gathered around me were Mithern (Warlock), Rowena (Crusader), Stag (Fighter), Baldrick the Pleb (Crusader), Taran (Crusader), Kalis II (Crusader), Guy Du Bas (Crusader), Grewcore (a silly dwarvish Warlock), Sir Ripp Tishus (an even sillier half-orc Thief) and the usual bad apples that seem to turn up in every barrel, Lord Blackmoor and John Black. I do not know why I thought they were evil, it is just a gift of mine.

People looked at me strangely. Did I look odd or something? Well, I was carrying a notepad and biro, so I can see where I may have been slightly



conspicuous. Yet then, as I was doing my intrepid reporter bit and interviewing Baldrick the Pleb, the party started off. I don't know why, I can't remember where. Maybe I should have wrote it down. Down...ah, that's it...down a steep bank of steps, we came to a place where two men lay dead on the ground. Everyone moved in cautiously, but nothing happened to them. The only thing that did happen is that a man jumped out and the Crusaders stabbed him to death. First mistake every monster makes; standing up. Life expectancy goes up tenfold if you don't stand up. Well, you can't tell some people. I didn't even have time to ask them their names. Then we took a break. The countryside was bleak. It was cold. The mud was real-

ly interesting. I think it was drizzling too, but I didn't write that down, so I forget. We set off again.

Ahead a few men in black all bound together with a blanket, came running up the path. I asked the Referee what it was. He said, "What does it look like." I chanced, "An amorphous-orange-dye chucking blob on heat." He said, "Close enough."

When this was dispatched, we had the obligatory 'freeze frame' to mark up our wounds. When they asked me where I'd been hit, I asked where was the combat? The despairing looks made me look away. The mud was really interesting.

We went on and came to some gates. We saw lots of men and a boney thing. A man told us to turn back and placed a spell of fear on one of the Crusaders. My notes get a little garbled at this point because I dropped my notepad in the mud, but down the page a little we came to a river. Five orcs stood there and they wanted 50 groats to let us across. As we were only getting 50 groats to complete the whole mission (which I'm sure I should have made a note of), everyone else said, "No!" (Good quote that). Then, as I had an attack of panicked long-hand, I saw the party outflank the orcs and wipe them out. I managed to get there just before the last one died. He told me his name was Mr. Aaaaargghhh. Yet then I found out that our mission was to save the orcs prisoner, just in time to realise that the party had killed him in the battle-frenzy. Needless to say, the mud was really interesting.

So, Unmuddy the Mage survived the day and managed to stay very clean, but in a spasm of frustration at his attempts to do follow-up articles on all the survivors, the party stabbed him to death with his own ballpoint.

Apologies to Spirit Of Adventure for a joke at their expense. The day was very enjoyable and a recommended experience!

**Extract from the Spirit Of Adventure Adventurers Guide:  
Section: Adventure Status Modes**

During your adventure, you will encounter three different ADVENTURE STATUS MODES. The Referee will call out to inform you, the rest of your party and the monsters, as to what Mode you are in. The three modes are TIME IN, TIME OUT and TIME FREEZE.

**TIME IN**

When the Referee calls "TIME IN", it means that the adventure is running. During Time In, he will try to keep out of your way so that you can enjoy your adventure, but will still be close at hand to keep an eye on you, inform you of spell results and so on.

**TIME OUT**

When the Referee calls "TIME OUT", it means that your adventure has paused in order that your fellow adventures can be checked for damage. This Mode is usually called after Combat has occurred. The Referee will give you a rough idea of how your character is feeling during Time Outs. If there are any 'dead' monsters about when Time Out is called, try not to watch them as they will be getting up and moving off to their next positions, and if you see where they are going, it may spoil the element of surprise, both for the monsters and for you.

**TIME FREEZE**

When the Referee calls "TIME FREEZE", immediately stop whatever you are doing, remain motionless, close your eyes and ignore any sounds. Try to look at it as if you're on a video recording and someone has pressed the pause button. When Time In is called, try to carry on doing exactly what you were doing before the Time Freeze. As far as your character is concerned, nothing has happened. The pause on the video has been switched off. This Mode is usually caused to allow things to happen instantaneously -- For example, when a DEMON teleports into the middle of a group of adventurers.

...WHY, WHY, WHY...IS IT THAT EVERY TIME I TURN AROUND ANOTHER PIECE OF EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT IS WRITTEN OFF?...I THINK THIS CALLS FOR ACTION...



# OLD CHESTNUTS

By Michael Bywater



How many of you are waiting for the game, something new, something exciting, the next really big thing which will change the world? Me too. And you know what? I think we may have to wait rather a long time. I remember when Zork first appeared - or, at least, when it first swam into my own little orbit. I had heard about it, and the mainframe, two-word-command "adventures" which preceded it, but I'd never played them, since I didn't have a mainframe of my own and nobody was about to let an irresponsible writer loose on their big, kludgy, steam-driven corporate or university IBM. Those things drank Carling Black Label, and you needed credentials, special clothes and heavy insurance before you were even allowed to look at them through a pane of glass. The nearest I'd got was those fundamentally unsatisfying five-quid-in-the-slot things in arcades, and I must confess that the cost/benefit equation just didn't work out. The trouble was that the more time you needed, the less time you got, and after I had been wiped out within ten seconds of putting my money in the slot a few times, I just sort of gave up. I suppose you need one of those horrible addictive personalities to find it worthwhile; or, to be fair, a particular sort of horrible addictive personality. I certainly have an H.A.P., but it's the wrong type; mine is good for loose women, cheap bars, old biplanes and (God help me; I never could work out why) business productivity software. Things like cocaine, bridge, vodka martinis, motorcycles and Sumo wrestling leave me cold; and as for arcade adventures, they just didn't even get a look-in. (Hell, I was one of the first test-market players of Pac-Man; I thought it had about as much chance of success as a black Russian rabbi at a National Front rally.)

Then, one day, I got an early Olivetti word processor. One of the things it advertised was communications facilities, and I looked forward to "patching in," as we called it, to all those exciting games on all those mind-boggling mainframes. It was not to be, however. Hours of fruitless effort, culminating in an entire day spent with senior men-in-beards from Olivetti clustered around my machine, led us to abandon any efforts to communicate with anything at all as fairly fruitless, and I was confined to playing Rogue, a sort of precursor of Hack where a little "%" chased lots of little "a"s and "x"s around a sort of grid made out of "/"s

and "l"s and " \_ "s. Fun? No. Eventually IBM, true to their corporate motto - "Yesterday's Technology, Real Soon Now!" - came out with the PC. I persuaded Punch to buy a handful of the things, with the aid of a handsomely-bound "proposal" full of charts, lies, bullshit and numbered paragraphs. With the PCs we ordered a splendid program called Context MBA which was no use to us at all, another splendid program called BusiPost which was no use to us at all, and a third splendid program called Wordstar which was incredibly useful, except that the people who could use it hated it, and the rest just couldn't get the hang of it.

After a couple of weeks of this, the level of disaffection in the editorial offices had reached the foothills of out-and-out civil war, and even the men in suits, in their slow but imbecilic way, were beginning to get the feeling that something was wrong. Obviously we needed something to bond everyone together in affection and respect for the New Technology. Along came Zork. It was a lifesaver. People clustered round, offering helpful suggestions. Tempers were lost. The Editor himself was found slumped in his chair one afternoon, weeping fitfully and endlessly typing the same four-letter word after the prompt, in the hope that if he did it often enough, the game would stop saying "I don't understand the word '@\$%\*'" "You can tell the bloody thing's American," he said. "I don't understand the word @\$%\*' indeed! A decent game would say 'I'm really sorry, but I don't understand the word @\$%\*'. A Japanese game wouldn't say anything; it would just rip its bowels out and then behead itself in shame if it didn't understand a word! Pshaw!" I had never heard anyone actually say "Pshaw!" before, (the "P", surprisingly, is not silent) and it made a deep impression on me.

"Don't worry," I said, "Early days yet. You wait: soon these things will understand every word you say, and even if they don't, they'll be able to look it up, and paraphrase it, and all that stuff." I was confident in those days. But here we are, all this time later, and although adventure games have got a bit better at being sorry, they still say that they don't understand the word "@\$%\*", and a whole lot of other words besides. You still wander round "rooms", and you still solve puzzles, and damn me if some people aren't

still giving us phosphorescent moss and other old chestnuts like that. As for shoot-em-ups and the graphic arcade games, the quality of the graphics and the animation has improved wildly, thanks to more powerful processors and bigger memories, but they are still more-or-less offering the same scenarios. "You are trapped in the \_\_\_\_\_ by the evil \_\_\_\_\_. To escape you must shoot the \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_. Use the \_\_\_\_\_ button to \_\_\_\_\_."

Well, phooey, that's what I say, and if you've not got enough brain to cover a match-head, you'll say it too, because the truth is that that's all there is, folks, and there won't be any really startling developments for some time. The thing is, it's nothing to do with hardware. All that better hardware (or bigger hardware, or faster hardware, or whatever) will give you is more of the same. Take television: picture quality has got better, editing facilities more sophisticated, screens bigger, sound more faithful, cameras more portable and actresses more pretentious, but the medium is still only any good for doing television programmes. All the creative groundwork was done in the first few years after television was introduced, and thereafter it was simply a question of doing it better, cheaper, faster, louder or what you will. Same with the gramophone. Now, it's called a CD player, but it's still only any good for sitting in front of and listening to the tune. And that's why I say the revolution's over. From now on, it's evolution instead. Things will get better. Graphics will improve beyond recognition. The adventure-writers will get better too, and concentrate as much on making the stuff as fun to read as fun to solve. Games in general will get bigger, more open-ended; there'll be more ways in which you can affect the outcome, and software will get more "intelligent".

But as far as there being something around the corner which you'll pick up and say "Wow! I never saw anything like this before!", forget it. It may happen; but it won't happen for your PC, or for anything like it. It'll not just be on a new machine, but a new sort of machine - probably something which hasn't even got a name yet.

And I hope I'll be the first to tell you about it.



MB.



...THE CROSSWORD IS FAR TOO SMALL...GET SOMETHING BIGGER...BIGGER...BIGGER...HAVE YOU GOT THAT?...GOOD...

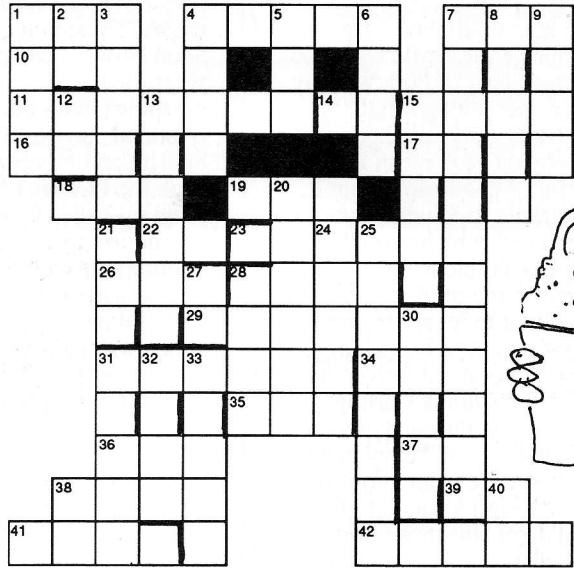


# CLIVE'S MONSTER CROSSWORD

Most clues and/or answers have a decidedly monstrous theme. Beware: certain answers are abbreviations. Good luck...

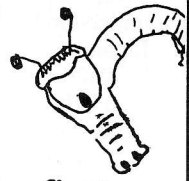
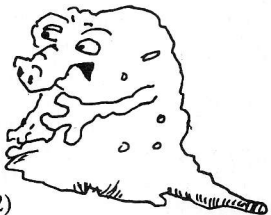
**ACROSS**

1. Half of a giant duo - the one without the degree (3)
4. Sugar cereal monster's gooey obsession (3)
7. She had a hand in *King Kong*. Or vice-versa (3)
10. A quiet habitat of 11 across (3)
11. Firebird doesn't exist! (7)
14. In short, 38 across held captive by Daleks (2)
15. Way of walking and sounding like a football crowd (4)
16. Foliage must conceal a giant bird (3)
17. Bird that 'atches on farms: 14th letter (2)
18. Boxer who appeared in the first three scenes of 8 down (3)
19. It's that monkey again, in a school gym-lesson (3)
22. City, convenient when you don't know the songwords (2)
23. Undead couch-potato (6)
26. Initially enchanting little fellow (3)
28. An apple a day holds a heartfelt request (4)
29. Genetic disasters sound like silenced insects (7)
31. Scene of terrifying arachnoid encounter with Ms M (6)
34. What to say in a naïve attempt to control Cerberus? (3)
35. Saute a little fish (3)
36. Cyclopean eye-count (3)
37. Mechanical braininess possessed by wraith (2)
38. Boy trapped by hysterical animal (4)
39. Negative number (2)
41. You wouldn't like this big green thing when he's angry (4)
42. How Scottie addresses the Vulcan? No, a ghost (5)

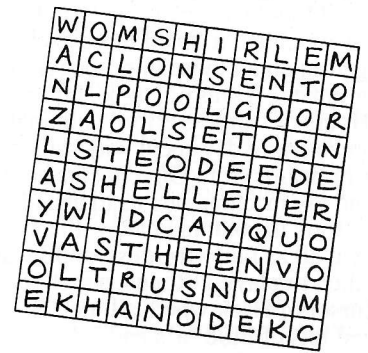


**DOWN**

1. Note King Kong - and just stand open-mouthed (4)
2. *Confidential* club is in position (2)
3. Grave-robber, from Humber-side, we hear (5)
4. Round of applause for *The Beast With Five Fingers* (4)
5. Germanic water-sprite is a thief, it is said (3)
6. Shout, coward! But not 'ow' (4)
7. Doctor who had a monster success with *Bits and Pieces* (12)
8. Ridley Scott film that put everyone off exotic food (5)
9. Still one unidentified Himalayan monster (4)
12. Musical abbreviation for the monsters of rock? (2)
13. Six-fifty in a Cambs cathedral city. How a 33 down may cackle? (6)
15. Information, that is, on an evil Arabian spirit (5)
20. Type of mischievous geist, favoured twice by Spielberg (6)
21. Vampire actor in jeans? (3)
24. A carnivore ate my stew? Well, he would (5)
25. Screamers prohibit the woman on two points (8)
27. Wavelength Freddie Mercury may begin to use (2)
28. Magic dragon, loved by the orange star of 4 down perhaps (4)
30. Audibly take in the waistband of a Greek giant (5)
31. A hill or tunnel is the setting for the return of the Scandinavian dwarf (5)
32. Unused letters name arm-bone initially (4)
33. Chum loses redhead, and becomes a really nasty creature (5)
38. Gold to the French (2)
40. Comes out of a 42 across - literally (2)



the east wall is a scroll pinned to the stone by a brown-handled sword, and in the west wall is a sturdy door. Scratched across the door are the words: **PROCEED THOUGH WARE WOLVES.**  
 >take sword  
 You are unable to remove the sword from the stone.  
 >take scroll and read it  
 The scroll rips as you pull it away from the sword. The scroll reads:  
 To find the way to the misty, elusive treasure, start first at the old oak in the southeast corner of the isle, then take 2 paces northwest, 2 paces north, 2 paces east, 4 paces northwest, just past the tiny well, then 2 paces west, 2 short steps southwest, here there is a silver birch, then 3 south, 1 east, 1 southeast, 1 east again, 4 north, then another 1 east, 1 south, 1 southeast, 2 south, past the cross, then a final pace



## THE WIZARD'S COTTAGE III

By John.

**So you trek ever deeper into the riddling cottage. With the four elemental items tucked safely in the sack at your waist (the water-filled kettle, the sphere of glass, the windowbox and the lit oil lamp), you**

**travel beyond the first Guardian and find yourself in a totally different demesne...**

The Pool Room.  
 Beyond the door is an eerily lighted chamber, all of stone. The light is faintly blue in colour and comes from beneath the waters of a square pool. In this stands a green-skinned, bald-headed man with great muscles and a trident in his hand. Upon the north wall lies a grid etched in black ink, covered in meaningless letters, on

southwest. If you have been taking notes, all should be apparent at this point.  
 >open door  
 The sturdy door groans loudly as you heave it open and beyond you see another bare stone room. Bloodstains cover the walls and a lingering smell of death and decay pervades the air. At the back of the room hangs a shredded blood-red curtain that half hides a wooden trapdoor. Yet as your eyes adjust to the darkness, you notice several dark hunched shapes lurking in the far corners of the chamber. These look like wolves, having lupine faces and glinting killers' eyes, yet they stand on two legs like men. Slowly they approach and you slam the door and rethink this whole situation!

So how does one reach the trapdoor alive? Is there a way past the wolves? And how do you rid the room of the second Guardian? Approach this as you would an ordinary adventure game. You have seven moves. Write all your answers as adventure commands (ie. if you think that the way to get past the wolves is by reading the scroll to them then reply: >take scroll, open door, w, read scroll to wolves). Send your solution to John Trevillian at the usual address. And as an incentive there will be a draw of the correct answers and the five chosen will win money-off vouchers!

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTIONS



The winners of the Cryptic Crossword No. 2 were: Phil Armstrong of Gateshead, Stuart Phillips of Nottingham, Neil Shipman of Bristol, Alex Spiers of Charlton and Andrew Taft of Norwich. The Cottage solution is ideally completed as >get kettle, window-box, lamp and sphere (or any of the other permutations of water, earth, fire and air) >down >push D steps (the third and sixth) >show windowbox (earth) to guardian >pass the guardian. The only person to get this right was: Ian Urquhart of Edmonton.  
 \* \* \* \*

# The Official Secrets BEST SELLERS Chart

A top thirty list of the best-selling software throughout the Clubs in the past two months.

	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
1 F16 FALCON		OFFICIAL SECRETS
2 DUNGEON MASTER SOLUTION BOOK	MISC.	DISCOVERY
3 SWORD OF SODAN	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
4 TV FOOTBALL (AMERICAN FOOTBALL)	AMIGA	INTERCEPTOR
5 GALDREGON'S DOMAIN	AMIGA	READYSOFT
6 DRAGON'S LAIR (REQUIRES 1 MEG)	AMIGA	INTERCEPTOR
7 GALDREGON'S DOMAIN	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT
8 F16 FALCON	ATARI ST	FIREBIRD
9 ELITE	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
10 CHAOS STRIKES BACK	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
11 DUNGEON MASTER	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
12 DUNGEON MASTER (1 MEGABYTE)	AMIGA	ELECTRIC DREAMS
13 SUPER HANG ON	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
14 ROCKET RANGER	AMIGA	GREMLIN GRAPHICS
15 FEDERATION OF FREE TRADERS	ATARI ST	DIGITAL INT.
16 F-16 COMBAT PILOT	ATARI ST	PALACE
17 BARBARIAN 2	ATARI ST	ADDICTIVE
18 KRYSTAL	AMIGA	GRAND SLAM
19 PACMANIA	AMIGA	MANDARIN
20 LOMBARD RAC RALLY	AMIGA	MANDARIN
21 STOS GAMES CREATOR	ATARI ST	FIREBIRD
22 ELITE	ATARI ST	RAINBIRD
23 UNIVERSAL MILITARY SIMULATOR	AMIGA	OCEAN
24 OPERATION WOLF	AMIGA	IMAGEWORKS
25 SPEEDBALL	AMIGA	MANDARIN
26 LOMBARD RAC RALLY	ATARI ST	OCEAN
27 OPERATION WOLF	ATARI ST	MANDARIN
28 LOMBARD RAC RALLY	IBM PC	ADDICTIVE
29 KRYSTAL	ATARI ST	OFFICIAL SECRETS
30 CONFIDENTIAL ISSUE 1	MISC.	

# The Official Secrets CALENDAR for 1989

A month-to-month list of notable events and dates throughout the year ahead.

Saturday 22nd April

PGA Play-By-Mail Convention (see details on the back page)

23rd June - 25th June

The Atari Computer Show at Alexandra Palace, Wood Green, London N22. Organised by Database Exhibitions.

8th July - 9th July

GuildMeet in the grounds of Coombes Abbey, Coventry. This will include a medieval market, Wild West displays, crafts and a whole range of events from the hobby. Organised by The Adventurers Guild.

(If you have heard of anything up-and-coming to be added to this list, please write in and tell us now!)



...WHAT'S THIS?...LETTERS FROM MIKE GERRARD AND THE EMERALD ISLES...THAT IS CERTAINLY AN IMPROVEMENT FROM THE USUAL DRIVEL...

# FOR YOUR EYES ONLY...



**Ring! Ring! -click- "The Man In Black here... What a hectic month keeping track of all the bundles of mail we have been getting. The postman must wonder why we have so much CONFIDENTIAL mail going out of here! As always, send comments, criticisms and topics for discussion to the usual address. You can even include them with your orders...**

Dear OS,  
The interview with assorted adventure writers made interesting reading - even for me, and I was there! Mind you, it's often hard to remember what happened at the end of a long day at the PC Show. One thing I wanted to make clear, though, was the comment left dangling at the end, which implied that I was about to reveal secrets of how to hack into Prestel. What I went on to say was emphatically the opposite, that I didn't give the fanzine concerned a plug in my adventure column because I was appalled at what they were suggesting, telling readers ways of getting hold of other people's passwords. I quoted the examples of some of their fiddles to the others just to show how devious they were being, and why I wouldn't mention the fanzine despite the fact that in other respects it was good.

Congratulations on the three issues of CONFIDENTIAL so far. It's become the most essential adventure read since *Micro Adventurer* closed down - apart from the adventure section in *Your Sinclair*, of course!  
Best wishes, Mike Gerrard.

**The Man In Black says:** Due of course to the technical hitch caused by Agent Walkland's tape running out, we couldn't include the last closing part of your speak, Mike, and apologies if it implied anything untoward. Thanks for clearing things up. And for those of you who have not guessed from the



above, Mike Gerrard writes the adventure section of *Your Sinclair*! But from this sombre note we plunge straight into the ridiculous with this:

SR,  
1 million apologies for my MOTHER putting Special Delivery on the check, this was caused because she watches too many Inspector Cluseu films: (A Special Delivery, a beum\*, were you expecting one?) and so every time I say Special Reserve she says 'Special Delivery'. She has now been executed and will not trouble you again. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.  
Jon  
(\*bomb)

**The Man In Black says:** Well, a lesson to be learned for all mothers out there, I think. So passing swiftly on...

Dear Official Secrets,  
Congratulations on the launch of the Club and on CONFIDENTIAL - you seem to have got the balance just right. This Club is an answer to my prayers as here in Ireland one tends to be isolated from the rest of Europe - and Micro Adventuring is no exception. Apart from myself and the other members of the "gang of five" who meet weekly to beat our heads against my 48k Spectrum I know no one else on this Isle who is doing it. Hopefully, through the Club, valuable contacts will be made.  
Brendan (Something) (Dr.), Dublin.

**The Man In Black says:** If you live in Ireland (or elsewhere) and want to get in contact with Brendan and his "gang", then give me a call on the usual helpline number and I'll put you in touch. And if anyone else wants to meet people on the same wavelength, drop us a line and we'll see what we can do.

Dear John (Oh no, a 'Dear John Letter'),

I note your request for a few ideas on how to approach adventure games generally. Well, not being a master of the written word, I'm afraid that this will probably be as helpful as a second-hand prophylactic. However, here goes:

Firstly, with the exception of *Beyond Zork*, games recently have failed to occupy me for more than ten hours. By ten hours, I don't mean ten continuous hours either. I never spend more than (say) three/four hours in any one session. I believe that after that amount of time one's brain gets into a rut if presented with a problem. Starting afresh the next night, one often forgets the input one was trying the previous session. I've often cracked a problem within five minutes of booting up which the previous night was

causing me severe hassles.

I never try to solve a problem as soon as it appears. Rather, I prefer to map out as much of the game as I can, noting objects, characters, and any prima facie meaningful descriptive text. I then consider the problems which have become apparent on this general 'faffing about'. These, of course more often than not, lead to other problems, eg. the locked door, which when opened by the hidden key, leads to new locations. I try to consider to what possible use I could use the objects offered to me by the author. I attempt to look at a problem and review the objects (or characters) and to bring them together for a possible solution.

I know from my days on the *ACE* and *Zzap* helplines that an awful lot of people do not draw maps. I cannot see how this approach does not inevitably lead to missed areas of the game. How can one be sure that one has tried all ten directions from any particular room? I reckon that a map is essential. Particularly if one is playing several games at once. I used to play three at a time so that when I got stuck on one, I didn't dwell on it, but moved across to another problem on another game. However, with the paucity of adventure games around at the present, I'm now compelled to play one by one as and when they are released. I've even resorted to buying games like *Chronoquest* which in times past I wouldn't have touched with the proverbial bargepole.

I hope that the above has adequately outlined the philosophy of my approach to adventure gaming in general. Meanwhile, I await *Fish* with bated breath (or baited, even? Arf! Arf!).  
Bruce Marshall, Cheshire.

**The Man In Black says:** A very interesting letter. Has anyone any philosophy of their own to the whole adventure game genre. Or who perhaps has a genuine interest in games such as *Chronoquest*? Is there a shortage of good adventures.

**Your comments please to: The Man In Black, The Cellar Next To The Pay Phone, etc...(beep, beep) Oh no...(beep beep)... it's the pips...(beep beep)... Got to go..."-click- brrrrrrrrrr...**

## Diary Of An Adventurer - Aged 13

March 13th 1989: Dear Diary, Today I sent off to join *Official Secrets* after my girlie friend Suzie told me about how gob-smackingly brilliant it was as her best friend was a member and he had shown her what he got behind the bike sheds. I think she was trying to make me jealous, but I'll show her. She said I was spotty and had a personality like a damp squib coz I didn't know nothing about adventure games like what he did. She said she'd rather be driving about in his new car, than watch me pick my nose all evening while playing Starglider 2. She said he's got a Nome Ranger. I wonder what cc that is? Underneath though, I think she's just playing hard to get. Still, they must be doing rude things as she mentioned he showed her his border zones. This sounds really disgusting, but I don't know where they are, do you Diary?

March 17th 1989: Dear Diary, Today I received all the things from *Official Secrets*, including a copy of *Gnome Ranger* by Level 9. So it's not a car after all. I was so cross, I can tell you. But to top it all, the game was faulty anyway! I loaded it straight up and couldn't even get the fire button to work. Stupid program. All the instructions were printed onto the screen when it booted up and the picture didn't scroll at all. I thought they said this game was mega? There wasn't even a glimmer of any on-screen sprites! I have just parcelled it up and sent it back. I'm not having this rubbish. It cost me half my blackjack winnings to get this! The manual for the game was about the biggest I've ever seen and they obviously don't want you to read it as it's got CONFIDENTIAL splattered all over the cover. It weren't even straight. And there was no artwork on the outside. The only thing was a picture of the girl who programmed it on the box. Well, I think it was a girl coz she was called Ingrid, but what a horror! I thought Swedish women were supposed to be pretty? And talking of women, Suzie has gone completely off the rails as she has now apparently joined a strip group called the *Leather Goddesses*. I told her it was me who loved her and she told me to drop dead. Still, I'll show her. Just as soon as I get a working copy of that stupid game.

April 1st 1989: Dear Diary, Is this a joke or what? That useless *Official Secrets* lot have sent me another faulty disk that won't work. I rung them up and they said that it was not nothing to do with them as it didn't use a joystick. They said I had to type in things and it would work. I tried that but all I got was a stupid message saying 'I don't understand that.' Still the disk was useful in the end as I stuffed it in the wheel of Suzie's bike and broke all the spokes. Ha ha.

April 2nd 1989: Dear Diary, Today Ricky (that's Suzie's best friend with the broader zones that I was telling you about) told me that I should stop being such a child and grow up. So I went to see Toady, the class swot straight after and he said he would show me about adventure games. I told him he better else I'd smash his face in, so I think I'm on my way to winning Suzie back and beating Ricky at his own game. Ya boo sucks, I'll show them!

### THE UNBELIEVABLY ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO SOFTWARE-SPEKE

OUT NOW: Imminent

IMMINENT: Out next month

OUT NEXT MONTH: Out Christmas

OUT CHRISTMAS: Forget it

TOTALLY ORIGINAL GAMEPLAY: Provided you've never seen an arcade game before

PACKED ONTO FOUR DISKS: It should have been on one but our data compression program broke!

HILARIOUS TEXT: About as funny as a broken pencil

WONDERFULLY ATMOSPHERIC: It's an adventure

TOTALLY ADDICTIVE: It's an arcade game

THE GRAPHICS ARE BREATHTAKING!: It's rubbish

BEAUTIFUL PACK ARTWORK: But the on-screen graphics were created on a ZX81

WILL TAKE MONTHS TO SOLVE: There is no manual

A BLEND OF ARCADE AND ADVENTURE: We want to sell as many copies as we can

A MEGA-GAME: Ooh, at least thirty quid

AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD STOCKISTS: There are about three in the country

## Are YOU Interested In PBM?

Then you should attend the Postal Gamers' Association's Convention. The Convention will be held at Surbiton Assembly Rooms on April 22nd from 10.15am - 5.00pm. Many PBM companies will be attending, and this represents an ideal opportunity to find out what's happening in the PBM hobby. There will also be other gaming-related stalls, demonstrations, discussions and two bars.

Admission is £4 (£2.50 to PGA members) on the day, with advance tickets costing 50p less. It is advisable to book in advance to ensure a place.

If you can't make the convention but would like to find out more about PBM then why not join the PGA? Annual membership of £4 brings you 4 issues of our quarterly newsletter which is filled with news, views, reviews and information on the PBM hobby. We also run an ombudsman service to deal with any problems you have with PBM companies. And, of course, PGA membership gets you cheaper admission to PGA conventions.

**The Postal Gamers' Association, Basement Flat,  
5 St. Annes Crescent, Lewes, E. Sussex, BN7 1SB**

**Get the most from your hobby!**



Team,

Bob has been  
eliminated. Looks  
like we have a  
spy in our midst.  
BOSS

